

PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or* **AWAKENED INDIA**

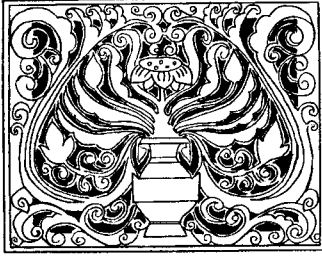


**JUNE
2003**



A Monthly Journal of the Ramakrishna Order
Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

VOL. 108
ISSN 0032-6178



Monthly Journal of Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

JUNE 2003

CONTENTS

Traditional Wisdom	289	The Charm of the Upanishads ...	318
		<i>C S Ramakrishnan</i>	
This Month	290	The Ramakrishna Maxim for	
		Achievement ...	324
Editorial:		<i>Dr. B T Advani</i>	
Giving Up	291		
Prabuddha Bharata-100 Years Ago	296	Kaṭha Rudra Upaniṣad ...	329
		<i>Swami Atmapriyananda</i>	
Half a Decade in the Enchanting		Glimpses of Holy Lives ...	331
Environs of Along	298		
<i>Swami Kirtidananda</i>		Reviews	333
In South America: Brazil,		Reports ...	336
Argentina, Uruguay	304		
<i>Swami Smaranananda</i>			
Reflections on the <i>Bhagavadgita</i>	309		
<i>Swami Atulananda</i>			



Visit us at: www.advaitaonline.com for a free internet edition

Editorial Office:

Prabuddha Bharata

Advaita Ashrama

P.O. Mayavati, Via. Lohaghat

Dt. Champawat 262 524, Uttaranchal

E-mail: awakened@rediffmail.com

Publication Office:

Advaita Ashrama

5-Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014

Ph: 91•33•22440898 / 22452383 / 22164000

Fax: 22450050

E-mail: pb@advaitaonline.com

Cover: Temples in Dakshineswar seen from the Ganga. The divine site of the first 'awakening'.

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 108

JUNE 2003

No. 6

❧ Traditional Wisdom ❧

DISCRIMINATION

ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्येत्येवंरूपो विनिश्चयः ।
सोऽयं नित्यानित्यवस्तुविवेकः समुदाहृतः ॥

A firm conviction of the mind that Brahman is real and the universe unreal is designated as discrimination between the Real and the unreal. (*Vivekachudamani*, 20)

If you wash an elephant well and leave it at large, it is sure to make itself dirty in no time; but if, after the wash, you tie it down in its stable, it will remain clean. So, if by the good influences of holy men you once become pure in spirit, and then allow yourself to mix freely with worldly men, you are sure to lose that purity soon; but if you keep your mind fixed on God, you will never more get soiled in spirit. (*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, 118)

How little intelligence does a man possess! He may require one thing, but asks for another. He starts to mould an image of Shiva and often ends up by making that of a monkey. It is best therefore to surrender all desires at the feet of God. He will do what is best for us. But one may pray for devotion and detachment. These cannot be classed as desires. (Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi)

Get your mind to cling to Him as far as you can. For then only the great magic of this world will break of itself. But then, you must persevere. You must take off your mind from lust and lucre, must discriminate always between the real and the unreal—must settle down into the mood of bodilessness with the brooding thought that you are not this body, and must always have the realisation that you are the all-pervading Atman. (Swami Vivekananda, CW, 6.482)

∞ This Month ∞

Giving Up, this month's editorial, is a discussion on the various forms of internal renunciation described in the *Bhagavadgita*.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago features excerpts from Swami Virajanandaji's article 'Sri Ramakrishna and His Mission to the World: What It Can Teach Us'.

In the sixth and concluding part of **Half a Decade in the Enchanting Environs of Along**, Swami Kirtidanandaji brings down the curtain on his absorbing reminiscences of the early days of the Ramakrishna Mission's work in Arunachal Pradesh by narrating some more touching incidents about the tribal students. A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and former editor of this journal, the author lives in Vivekananda Ashrama, Ulsoor, Bangalore.

In the second and concluding part of his travelogue **In South America: Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay**, Swami Smarananandaji describes his visit to Buenos Aires and Uruguay. The author is General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Swami Atulanandaji (1870-1966), known as Gurudas Maharaj, was one of the early aspirants in the West to have found fulfilment in the Vedanta Movement. A monk of the Ramakrishna Order, respected for his spiritual attainments, he had close association with Swami Turiyanandaji during the Shanti Ashrama days. **Reflections on the Bhagavadgita** is Atulanandaji's commentary on the *Gita* being serialized from this month. A detailed introduction precedes the actual com-

mentary.

Swami Vivekananda considered the Upanishads a great mine of strength enough to invigorate the whole world. **The Charm of the Upanishads** by Sri C S Ramakrishnan is an inviting introduction to the Upanishads, affording with profuse quotations a glimpse of the subject matter they deal with: the divinity of man. A former editor of *Vedanta Kesari*, the author has a long and close association with Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai.

The Ramakrishna Maxim for Achievement by Dr B T Advani is a stimulating article highlighting the relevance of Sri Ramakrishna's prescription for success. Closely associated with the Ramakrishna Movement for more than five decades, the author has been the convenor of the Bhavdhara Prachar Parishad, Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra for the past thirteen years. With an illustrious teaching career behind him, he is General Secretary of Shri Ramakrishna Samskriti Peeth, Kamptee, Nagpur, a premier educational institution for girls functioning on the lines of Swami Vivekananda's ideas on education.

Kaṭha Rudra Upaniṣad is the third instalment of a translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidya-mandira, Belur. The elaborate notes are based on Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary.

Glimpses of Holy Lives describes some inspiring incidents from the life of Kabir Das.

Giving Up

EDITORIAL

Explaining the significance of the *Bhagavadgita* Sri Ramakrishna said, 'It is what you get by repeating the word ten times. It is then reversed into 'tagi', which means a person who has renounced everything for God. And the lesson of the Gita is: "O man, renounce everything and seek God alone." Whether a man is a monk or a householder, he has to shake off all attachment from his mind.'¹ Sri Ramakrishna's life was a blazing fire of renunciation. In the arati hymn to Sri Ramakrishna Swami Vivekananda describes him as *tyagishvara*, king among renouncers. In the *Gita* Sri Krishna describes *tyaga* as a divine quality.² We shall discuss here the various kinds of renunciation depicted in the *Gita*. Essentially, renunciation means giving up internally, since it is the mind that is responsible for one's sense of bondage and freedom.³

Giving up Weakness

Swami Vivekananda considered a single verse from the *Gita* of paramount importance: 'Don't yield to unmanliness, O Partha. It does not befit you. Give up this faint-heartedness and arise, O scorcher of enemies!'⁴ According to Swamiji, if one reads this single verse, one gets all the merits of reading the entire *Gita*; for in this one verse lies embedded the whole message of the *Gita*.⁵ Swamiji condemned weakness in no uncertain terms. And he considered strength to be the remedy for weakness, not brooding over weakness.

People widely quote Swamiji's famous utterance at his Madras address 'Vedanta in Its Application to Indian Life': 'You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita.' (3.242) The next couple of sentences are more important. Swamiji's emphasis was not on playing football

but strengthening oneself through that for a better grasp of the *Gita*: 'You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger. You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little of strong blood in you. You will understand the Upanishads better and the glory of the Atman when your body stands firm upon your feet, and you feel yourselves as men.' (3.242) For a better appreciation of the 'football' sentence, we need to read a couple of sentences before that. Swamiji said, 'We speak of many things parrot-like, but never do them; *speaking and not doing has become a habit with us. What is the cause of that? Physical weakness.* This sort of weak brain is not able to do anything; we must strengthen it. First of all, our young men must be strong. Religion will come afterwards.' (3.242; emphasis added)

Elsewhere, Swamiji gave a revolutionary definition of sin: 'If there is sin, this is the only sin—to say that you are weak, or others are weak.' (2.308) He said ahimsa (non-resistance) is a virtue only if the practitioner has the needed strength to hit straight from the shoulders and still refrains from doing that. (1.39) He even advocated that wickedness is preferable to a life of lethargy:

I once met a man in my country whom I had known before as a very stupid, dull person, who knew nothing and had not the desire to know anything, and was living the life of a brute. He asked me what he should do to know God, how he was to get free. 'Can you tell a lie?' I asked him. 'No,' he replied. 'Then you must learn to do so. It is better to tell a lie than to be a brute, or a log of wood. You are inactive; you have not certainly reached the highest state, which is beyond all actions, calm and serene; you are too dull even to do something wicked.'

Swamiji looked upon strength as the only test of truth: '... anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually, and spiritually, reject as poison; there is no life in it, it cannot be true.' (3.224-5) Giving up weakness is an essential precondition for the practice of any other forms of renunciation. Weakness, again, was the first thing Sri Krishna asked Arjuna to give up.

Giving up Desire, Anger and Greed

Sri Krishna considered desire (*kama*), anger and greed to be the threefold entry to hell and ruin of the Self. 'Therefore let man renounce these three.'⁶ Arjuna asked him what prompted a man to commit sin in spite of himself, driven as if by force. Sri Krishna's reply: 'They are desire and anger, arising from rajas. They are the enemies, all-devouring and the cause of sin.' (3.36-7) And he asked Arjuna to

Giving up weakness is an essential precondition for the practice of any other forms of renunciation. Weakness, again, was the first thing Sri Krishna asked Arjuna to give up.

discipline the sense organs first and then kill desire, which destroys one's knowledge and wisdom. And he further said that the enemy called desire could be killed only if one is anchored in the Atman, the spiritual Self behind the body, senses, manas and buddhi. (3.41)

Desires become troublesome only when the will—buddhi in action—becomes tagged to them by a resolution (*sankalpa*). We know that any puja begins with a *sankalpa* like 'On this auspicious day ... I perform this puja with such and such an end in view.' The idea is to fix the will on the act of puja so that the mind does not stray. When the will gets hooked to desire, the descent is certain and systematic: the will (and the manas) get connected to the senses, which come in contact with sense ob-

jects. Sri Krishna wanted us to give up these desires born of *sankalpa*: 'Renouncing all the desires born of the will (*sankalpa*), drawing back the senses from their pursuits by strength of mind, let a man gradually attain tranquillity with the help of buddhi coupled with fortitude. Once the mind is established in the self, he should think of nothing else. (6.24-5)

An important truth is worth remembering here. The satisfaction of desires does not help us get rid of them. King Yayati's life is a lesson in point. Cursed to premature old age, the king could become young again only if someone exchanged his youth for the king's old age. His last son agreed to do this. The story goes that Yayati enjoyed sense pleasures for a thousand years—Puranic hyperbole—at the end of which wisdom dawned on him. He exclaimed, 'Never can desires be quenched by enjoying sense objects. Like fire fed with ghee they only flame up all the more.'⁷

Sri Ramakrishna considered lust and greed as the two impediments to God-realization. His own life was a blazing fire of renunciation. Those who have studied his life know what a pure and ideal married life his and Sri Sarada Devi's was. Theirs was a marriage that consummated at the spiritual level, not physical. He looked upon her as the Divine Mother herself and she in turn looked upon him as Mother Kali herself. In *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* Swami Saradananda, his disciple, discusses the necessity of marriage in Sri Ramakrishna's case.

At the present time we have almost forgotten that besides the satisfaction of the senses there is a very sacred and high purpose of marriage and this is why we are reducing ourselves to being worse than beasts. It is only in order to destroy this beastliness of men and women of modern India that the Master, the teacher of the people, was married. Like all the other acts of his life, the act of marriage also was performed for the good of all.

'Whatever,' said the Master, 'is done here (meaning himself) is for you all. Ah, if I do all the sixteen parts (the whole) you may possibly do one. ...' If the Master himself had not been himself married, the lay disciples would have said, 'It is only because he is not married that he is able to talk glibly on continence. It is only because he has not made his wife his own and has never lived together with her that it is possible for him to read us long sermons.' It is only in order to counteract such foolish ideas that the Master was not only married but he had his wedded wife in the days of her youth by his side at Dakshineswar.⁸

What was Sri Ramakrishna's prescription to get rid of lust? He advised people to look upon women as forms of the Divine Mother. Swami Turiyananda, another disciple of his, asked him, 'Sir, how can one become free from lust completely?' Sri Ramakrishna replied: 'Why should it go my boy? Give it a turn in another direction. What is lust? It is the desire to get. So, desire to get God and strengthen this desire greatly. ... The more you go towards the east, the farther you will be away from the west.'⁹ Another day, the same disciple said to Sri Ramakrishna that he was not at all interested in women; in fact, he could not bear them. To this the Master replied: 'You talk like a fool! Looking down upon women! Why? They are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Bow down to them with respect. That is the only way to escape their snares.'¹⁰

Giving up Attachment to Work

'Act like an instrument' is Sri Krishna's sterling advice in the *Gita*.¹¹ 'All actions are performed by the gunas of Prakriti (sattva, rajas and tamas). But he whose mind is deluded by egotism thinks, "I am the doer." But he who knows the truth about the gunas and action remains unattached, perceiving that it is gunas as sense organs that are occupied

with gunas as sense objects.' (3.27-8)

There are two ways a spiritual aspirant tries to free himself from the sense of doership. If he follows the path of devotion, he cultivates the attitude, 'Not I, but You are the doer.' In Sri Ramakrishna's words, he looks upon himself as the machine and God as the operator. By 'I' the devotee aspirant means the body-mind system he usually identifies himself with. By negating this 'I' he gradually gets rid of his attachment to body and mind and becomes more devoted to God, who dwells as his inmost Self. An aspirant on the path of knowledge says on the other hand, 'It is the body and mind that act, not I.' By 'I' he refers to the Atman, his higher Self. This weans him from his identification with the body and mind, strengthening his identification with the Atman. Thus though there is an apparent difference in both the methods, the purpose is the

'Why should lust go my boy? Give it a turn in another direction. What is lust? It is the desire to get. So, desire to get God and strengthen this desire greatly. ... The more you go towards the east, the farther you will be away from the west.'

same: giving up identification with the body-mind complex.

In the fifteenth chapter of the *Gita* Sri Krishna advises Arjuna to surrender himself to the primeval Purusha from whom has streamed forth eternal activity. (15.4) Defining yoga as equanimity, Sri Krishna asks Arjuna to perform actions being steadfast in yoga and giving up attachment and remaining unconcerned about success and failure. (2.48) When an aspirant learns to act like an instrument, he neither hates disagreeable work nor likes agreeable work. (18.10)

Sri Ramakrishna advised his householder disciples to live in the world like a maidservant in a rich man's house. She per-

forms all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. 'Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all—with wife, children, father and mother—and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you.'¹²

Giving up the Fruits of Work

Karma-phala-tyaga (giving up the fruits of action) is a most frequently recurring idea in the *Gita*. 'For a man with body consciousness it is not possible to give up work,' says Sri Krishna. 'He who gives up the fruits of the work is indeed a tyagi.'¹³

Not even a fool would act unless prompted by a motive, says the well-known adage.¹⁴ So, how to reconcile between this adage and Sri Krishna's golden maxim that we

***Selfishness is at the root of all expectations
and consequent attachment to work.
Swamiji equated selfishness with the world
and unselfishness with God. He considered
unselfishness as the secret of true
happiness.***

have the right only to work, not to the fruits thereof? (2.47) There are motives and motives for work. The more selfish the motive, the more attached we become to work. Selfless work, too, has its inevitable result: purification of mind. We have this much choice while doing work: (1) be anxious about the fruits of work, be attached to the work and be swayed by success or failure in work; or (2) concentrate all our mental energies on the work in hand, certain that the work will bear fruit; and cultivate detachment from work. Swamiji's lecture 'Work and Its Secret' is a goldmine of ideas on the subject.

Our great defect in life is that we are so much drawn to the ideal, the goal is so much more en-

chanting, so much more alluring, so much bigger in our mental horizon, that we lose sight of the details altogether.

But whenever failure comes, if we analyse it critically, in ninety-nine per cent of cases we shall find that it was because we did not pay attention to the means. Proper attention to the finishing, strengthening, of the means is what we need. With the means all right, the end must come.¹⁵

The aspirant on the path of devotion works with the feeling that he is the servant and God, the master. His work is an offering to God. He concerns himself with the quality of work, being attentive to the means, and leaves the end (fruits) to God. Sri Krishna advises such an aspirant to offer everything to God: 'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as oblation in a sacrifice, whatever you give in charity, whatever austerities you perform—do that all as an offering to Me.

Thus you will become free from the bondage of actions, bearing good and evil results. With the heart steadfast in the yoga of renunciation and liberated you will come to Me.'¹⁶

The aspirant on the path of knowledge works with the feeling that it is only his body and mind that are active, it is only gunas that are interacting with gunas; he himself—his real nature—is detached from work. For such aspirants Sri Krishna prescribes performance of work identifying oneself with an awakened buddhi and evenness of mind. Such a worker is established in Yoga and frees himself even in this life from virtue and vice alike and is dextrous in work. Abandoning fruits of his actions, he becomes free forever from the birth-death cycle.¹⁷

Giving up Selfishness

Selfishness is at the root of all expectations and consequent attachment to work. Swamiji equated selfishness with the world and unselfishness with God.¹⁸ He considered

unselfishness as the secret of true happiness. His words are as forceful as they are educative:

We are all beggars. Whatever we do, we want a return. We are all traders. We are traders in life, we are traders in virtue, we are traders in religion. And alas! we are also traders in love. ...

We get caught. How? Not by what we give, but by what we expect. We get misery in return for our love; not from the fact that we love, but from the fact that we want love in return. There is no misery where there is no want. ...

Ask nothing; want nothing in return. Give what you have to give; it will come back to you—but do not think of that now, it will come back multiplied a thousandfold—but the attention must not be on that. Yet have the power to give: give, and there it ends. Learn that the whole of life is giving, that nature will force you to give. So, give willingly. Sooner or later you will have to give up. You come into life to accumulate. With clenched hands, you want to take. But nature puts a hand on your throat and makes your hands open. Whether you will it or not, you have to give. The moment you say, 'I will not', the blow comes; you are hurt. None is there but will be compelled, in the long run, to give up everything. And the more one struggles against this law, the more miserable one feels. It is because we dare not give, because we are not resigned enough to accede to this grand demand of nature, that we are miserable.¹⁹

* * *

All these forms of internal renunciation fundamentally involve training and discipline the mind with the help of buddhi. Such discipline is expected of both sannyasins and

householders conscious of their spiritual destiny. Minus internal renunciation, religion may just give some fleeting peace in this fleeting, painful world;²⁰ nothing more. *

References

1. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), 104.
2. *Bhagavadgita*, 16.2.
3. *Mana eva manuṣyānām kāraṇam bandhamokṣa-yoḥ*. —*Amritabindu Upanishad*, 2.
4. *Gita*, 2.3.
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.110.
6. *Gita*, 16.21.
7. *Bhagavata*, 9.19.14.
8. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970), 409.
9. Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2001), 359.
10. *ibid.*, 359.
11. *Gita*, 11.33.
12. *Gospel*, 81.
13. *Gita*, 18.11.
14. *Prayojanam anuddiṣya na mando'pi pravartate*.
15. CW, 2.1.
16. *Gita*, 9.27-8.
17. *ibid.*, 2.50-1.
18. CW, 1.87.
19. *ibid.*, 1.4-5.
20. *Duḥkhālayam aśāśvatam*. —*Gita*, 8.15.

Maya in a Word

Maya is of two kinds—kama and kanchana (lust and greed). Meditation is possible when you stay away from these two. However, by the grace of God, if you have self-awareness then there is no fear. But it is not a small thing to have that awareness. One has to work laboriously.

—Swami Turiyananda



June 1903

Sri Ramakrishna and His Mission to the World: What It Can Teach Us

Time rolls on its usual course, robbing us of our blessed childhood and landing us in youth, where we are hopelessly engrossed with vainly pursuing the fleeting shadows of the world, and before we are hardly aware of it we find ourselves going down the vale of tears! The blessed and innocent days of childhood subsequently become the dwellers of the dreamland—this is the irresistible law of Nature. But lo! in the life of Sri Ramakrishna Nature's law was set at naught. He was a child for life, a child, pure and simple, in the mask of a grown-up man, and those who had seen him in the latter period of his fleshly existence were charmed to see this extraordinary expression of a child in his face, one divinely illumined. Perhaps the first two impressions that every visitor of Sri Ramakrishna carried away with him—be he a devout religious believer or a sceptical and scoffing worldly soul—were his wonderful childlike nature and extreme simplicity. Like a child he could not take care of his dress, like a child he would sometimes cry out when hungry or thirsty, forgetful of time and place, whether he was in the parlour of a rich man whom he had gone for the first to see, or in a carriage, and like a child he could not eat much at a time, even when he said he was dying of hunger, but would take just a few mouthfuls. Like a child he could be easily consoled and satisfied. Once a gentleman went to see him when his arm was fractured. Sri Ramakrishna asked him if he had come there to see the temples. The newcomer replied, 'No, sir, I have come here to see you.' Sri Ramakrishna broke forth into a loud cry, 'What will you see, Bapu, my elbow-joint is dislocated. Oh, it is painning.' The gentleman was charmed with the scene and did not know what to answer. After a while in order to console him he said, 'There is no cause for anxiety, sir, it will be all right before long.' Immediately Sri Ramakrishna was as delighted as only a child could be and exclaimed 'Will it be so, will it be so?' Then he called out to someone and told him 'This Babu has come from Calcutta, he says my hand will be all right.' Immediately he threw off all anxiety and became cheerful.

He would not allow anyone to call him Baba (father). 'I am the child of my Divine Mother, how can I be anybody's father?' Sometimes he was in a state of mind when he could not do a single act, however commonplace, without going to the temple and asking his Mother's permission which he used to get readily, for him his Mother was more real than those earthly counterparts of Her known to us.

Once he was told by a student fresh from college that his Samadhi was nothing but brain disease, a sort of nervous disorder due to weakness. No sooner had he heard this than he ran out to the temple of the Mother Kali, crying out, 'Mother, Mother.' Returning he said, 'Mother tells me there is nothing wrong with my head, but it is a mistake on your part to think so.' ...

Sri Ramakrishna was also equally simple. He never did wear the customary *Gerua* cloth of the Sannyasin. Many people came to see the Paramahansa with the idea that they would find an unapproachably grave-looking figure clad in *Gerua*, sitting on a tiger skin, having his hair in knotted locks and *Rudraksha* round his neck, body besmeared with ashes, and surrounded by *chelas* of the same type. What they found instead, was a simple plain-looking man, with a small white *dhoti* hanging loosely from his waist, sitting on a wooden *charpoy* in a nice room, with pictures of gods and goddesses on the walls! Might be, he was amusing himself with the young men who had come to see him as if he was one of themselves. His *bon-mots* were calling forth peals of laughter from the hearers

and he would continue in the same jocose and light vein, never caring what a visitor might think of the spectacle. But, lo, in a moment the scene was transfigured. In course of conversation the subject had suddenly turned into one about God and Soul, and the seemingly frivolous man had completely lost himself in deep Samadhi, sitting motionless, eyes fixed and half-closed, tears of joy rolling down the cheeks, fingers twisted and stiff, breath imperceptible, as if the senses and the mind had left their functions for good, driven back from a plane where they have no passport to enter, where time and creation are not, but Absolute Existence and Bliss beyond unity and duality! The Bhaktas, who had a few moments before been indulging themselves in merriment, were looking speechless on this strange transformation. Some out of the fullness of the heart were crying, some uttering aloud the name of the Lord. Such was he an unusual man, much more so, perhaps, as a Sannyasin, according to the popular idea.

Once a reputed physician of Calcutta was called to attend a patient at Dakshineswar. One the way back he strolled by the Ganges through the temple garden of Rani Rasmani. Various kinds of flowers had come out in the cool evening air. The doctor happened to see Sri Ramakrishna walking near by. Taking him to be a gardener of the place the doctor ordered him to pluck a few flowers for him, which Sri Ramakrishna instantly obeyed. What was the astonishment of the doctor, when years afterwards he came to examine his throat and cried out in amazement 'Woe to me, what had I done, I ordered him to pluck flowers for me!' ...

Sri Ramakrishna's tenacity to keep the truth was exemplary. ... Once while he was taking his food and talking of things spiritual, as was his wont, he was asked if he would have a second helping because he was given a very small quantity to begin with. Inadvertently he replied 'No.' when he finished he saw that he had not taken half enough. They asked him to have some more. He said, 'When once I have told "no", I can't eat any more now.' Once he told one of his Bhaktas that he would go for a walk in the garden of a gentleman near by in the evening. That afternoon there came many people from Calcutta to see him. The whole time was spent in talking on religious subjects with them. Late in the evening he remembered his promise. Could he rest without fulfilling it? No. A Bhakta asked 'What harm would there be if you did not go?' He replied 'Then I shall lose my adherence and devotion for keeping truth other times, which may be on more important matters.' He had the gate opened by the porter whom he in return gave some sweetmeat afterwards, and walked a little in that gentleman's garden and then only was he satisfied.

Once a distinguished leader of the Brahmo Samaj tried to dissuade from coming to Sri Ramakrishna a youth who was very eager to do so. The gentleman suggested that Sri Ramakrishna's head had gone wrong, that he was a mad man and such often became the lot of those, as in the case of many Western philosophers, who devoted themselves life-long to an abstruse subject too deeply. By and by these words reached Sri Ramakrishna. He invited the gentleman to come and see him. Twice or thrice this preacher sent word that he would come on such and such a date positively, but every time he did not keep it. After a long interval he turned up. Sri Ramakrishna spoke to him in his usual sweet way, 'Well, did you say my head has gone wrong? But you see when I say that I shall go to see someone on a certain day, I never fail to do it. While you an educated man with a sound brain, promised to come here twice or thrice but failed. Further you stated too much meditation was the cause of the derangement of my brain and cited parallel cases of occidental thinkers. But may I ask you if it is possible to lose one's sanity by meditating on the Consciousness which has made the universe conscious? What wonder with the weight of dead matter in them some Western minds would be unbalanced?' It is needless to add that the preacher bowed and confessed his error.

—Virajananda

Half a Decade in the Enchanting Environs of Along

SWAMI KIRTIDANANDA

Part 3: The Curtain Comes Down

So, in the final analysis, our work at Along was first to lay a strong foundation at the primary school level itself in the rural areas, as Swami Vivekananda wanted us to do more than a hundred years back, and Amartya Sen, the Nobel laureate, in our own times has been emphasizing as the need of the hour; second, to try to find the talents hidden within each boy or girl and give enough opportunities to develop them—what Swami Vivekananda had said when he defined education as ‘the manifestation of the perfection *already in man*’. We do not teach anything afresh. All knowledge is within our own being. We only try to create conditions to uncover it. That is what we were attempting to do. The tribal children are generally fair-complexioned and good-looking. But when they came to our institution, you would not believe it, they would be covered with dust and dirt, and the clothes they wore would be soiled—unbathed and unwashed as they must have been for months on end. Fifteen days at the institution, and they were different persons altogether. Their bodies would sparkle with their natural beauty. They would be washed and dressed in new clothes. The first manifestation of divinity!

Latent Talents

Then, as the education came along, their inner beauty would begin to show its brilliance unknown to them. It was always difficult to judge things from outside and come to a definite conclusion about the potential of a

boy or girl. Who knew what each one was capable of? For appearances were often deceptive. I have already mentioned the boy Loya. I said he was not doing well in the class. But that was only partly true, and applied to the period he was in the first two standards. But in the third standard, he suddenly came into his own. What would have been his fate if we had pushed him to the background because of his earlier dismal performance? Then, there was one Lizum Ete in standard II or I. He was a quiet boy. Nobody could imagine he had a radiant spark within. How nimble and keen-witted he was! When the boys in his class were asked to write an essay on the Siang River, on the banks of which they all lived, he came out with a most poetic piece. Of course, his English left much to be desired. That we could easily take care of. However, his description of the river meandering through the hills and glades right from where it starts in Tibet (where it is known as Tsang Po) right up to Along was a work of art.

Memorizing Maths Problems along with Answers!

That is why we always endeavoured to assess the performance of a boy or girl from his or her plane, and not from of ours. For example, the subject for an essay may be the same, let us say ‘Your Classroom’. But a standard I boy’s description of it need not be the same as that of a standard II or III boy or girl, and invariably it was not. It would be unjust on that score to dismiss it as puerile. That ap-

plied to the different children within the same standard, too. Our viewpoint was this: if things were quite okay and reasonable for their age, give them full marks. So in maths. Maybe the final answer was wrong, because he had missed one step somewhere. He need not be given zero for that. To the extent he had followed the steps correctly, we gave full marks. Quite often we found the boys who had scored very high marks in a particular subject, even maths, would not know the ABC of it. In English or Hindi, for example, they would not be aware of the basic grammatical construction of a sentence. What they would have done usually was to memorize thoroughly, right up to the comma or semicolon, the art in which the tribal children were specially experts, and reproduce the entire matter verbatim from the notes the teachers had dictated or even from the textbooks. Many teachers also expected only that from them. Thus they got full marks for it.

To avert this, in those days we followed a method of conducting the examinations. That is, the teachers would prepare some hundred questions carrying equal marks, from out of which ten would be selected, either by me or somebody else other than the one who had prepared the questions. Neither the teachers nor the children would know exactly which questions would appear. Once, in a maths paper, the digits in a particular question had interchanged because of a typographical error. It was different from what was given in the textbook. That hardly mattered. But the boy who was supposed to be the brightest in maths in that class, stood up to point out what he thought was a mistake. I happened to be the invigilator. I knew what he was hinting at. So, I asked him to get on with the work. But he was not convinced. He had memorized all the sums in the textbook, as also the answers, and found to his surprise that the answer he had arrived at did not correspond with the answer in the book. So, he thought the question set was wrong, though he had worked it out all

right and arrived at the correct answer. He could not visualize that the question could be set in any other way, or guess that only the digits had changed.

Arithmetic or Something Else?

Another time, a boy in another institution in Madras (now Chennai), of which I was in charge before I went to Along, was puzzled by a question in his arithmetic book. The sums were all simple multiplication problems: 'One mango costs this much; ten mangoes cost how much?', 'A motor car is travelling at 30 kilometres per hour; how many kilometres would it have travelled in twelve or thirteen hours?' He could work out all these easily. But he would be stuck when he came to question like 'Light travels at such and such a speed per second; how much would it travel in an hour?' or 'Sound travels at such and such a speed per second; how much would it travel in an hour?' He could not work them out. He brought them to me. I could not understand his difficulty. He had done similar other sums. He could not clearly explain either. I would say, 'What is the difficulty? These are the same as the other sums!' 'But, Swamiji,' he would say, 'they are not the same, you see!' But he could not explain, nor could I understand how they were not the same. After about ten or fifteen minutes of juggling like this, he suddenly said: 'A car travels at such and such a speed. That is all right. But how does *light* or *sound* travel?' That was his problem. A car he *sees* travelling, but not light or sound. It was not an arithmetic problem at all, as far as he was concerned, it was a psychological one. We elders are not able to see how children look at things. We only see it from our own point of view. That explains all the confusion we are in when dealing with them.

The Transforming Effect of the School Environment

In the same way, we are of the opinion that the children are averse to discipline, or-

der, study and so on, but it is not so, as they themselves have told me on occasions. We have only to provide them with the necessary environment, and the rest takes care of itself. Gautam, the son of Mr Dey, the then Deputy Commissioner of Siang District, was a recalcitrant boy, a classic example of the truth of the statement, 'Spare the rod and spoil the child.' He was hardly five years old then. Once, at a cultural function organized by the Nepali community to observe the Vijaya Dashami, Mr and Mrs Dey were the chief guests. As they entered the venue along with their son, one Colonel Narula, the then Commandant of the BRTF, fondly caressed him with his hand, just as a matter of courtesy more than anything else, with a welcome: 'Hello! How are you, Gautam?' The boy unceremoniously brushed him aside with a kick of his foot. The parents did not utter a word of rebuke. Later on he was admitted to our school. The next day he was admitted, the mother came to see how he was behaving. She saw him sitting in the class quiet like a lamb. She was surprised. She asked me: 'What did you do to him, Swamiji? What a contrast to his behaviour at home! What a transformation!' I said: 'I did not do anything. I have not gone that side at all. The very atmosphere here is such that the boys automatically behave well. They cannot but be good boys here.' And that was not absolutely untrue, exceptions only proving the rule. It is quite a different matter he took it out on his mother when he got home.

'Resume the Tests, Swamiji!'

I have referred to the monthly tests we were conducting regularly. Subsequently, we found that these tests were putting a heavy strain on both the teachers and the students. On the one hand, you had to proceed with the lessons to complete the syllabus; on the other, you had to correct the answer papers. It was difficult to cope with both together. There was no sufficient time. So we dispensed with the tests. We did not inform the students of the

reasons behind the decision. They all came to me in a group, and said: 'Please, Swamiji, resume these tests again. Otherwise, we won't take our studies seriously.'

'Start Study Hours Again'

Another incident with regard to this is worth relating here, though it happened at the institution in Chennai mentioned earlier. It was a year after I had taken charge there. During the long summer holidays, we had undertaken to make some changes in the hostel. We wanted to provide the boys with cots and also separate accommodation for sleeping, study and prayer. Until then a single hall was being used for all the three purposes. But we could not get the places ready in time for the next session, more especially the study hall. So we did not have study hours for some time. The boys were happy to begin with. One week they were playing all the time. But they were confused as to why we were not asking them to study. One boy, studying in standard VIII, came to me and asked. I jokingly said: 'Go, go! We are not going to have any more study hours. We have to be standing there with a stick in our hand all the while to make you sit quietly and study! From now on, you are at liberty to study or not! What is that to us? If you fail, it is you who will suffer. We shall send you out of the hostel! That's all.' He was frightened. He said immediately: 'No, no, Swamiji! Please start the study hours immediately. Otherwise, we won't study at all. Though, as children, we rebel against compulsion, still we *want* it; we want discipline. Please, please!' We get an insight into the working of the minds of children from this.

Little Acts of Kindness

That is all right—children may want discipline. It is also a noble objective, no doubt. But the difficulty is in enforcing it. A regimented approach in this matter is neither possible nor desirable, as we found out from experience. We have to be flexible and use our

discretion when to be strict and when not. I have referred to Jerken Gamlin. He was a very well-behaved boy in every respect, in the class as well as in following the rules of the hostel—very prompt and punctual in whatever he did. One morning, however, I found him still in bed while all the others had gone for the morning physical exercise, as per the routine of the hostel. I pulled him up for it, and asked him to do fifty sit-ups as a punishment. He was simply unwilling. I shouted at him—to no effect. He was adamant. Fortunately, I realized in time that no amount of force and threat would work on that day. It would have made him more rigid and unbending. There was nothing I could have done that morning to make him obey me. I gracefully withdrew. But before doing so, I fired a blank shot: 'Jerken! This time I am excusing you. If you repeat the mistake, you will have a good thrashing!' His reaction was as unexpected as it was unusual. *He thought I had been very forgiving and kind, though in fact I was helpless.* It is really amazing how children respond to our little acts of kindness, simple and innocent as they are.

This reminds me of what happened at the Chennai institution. I had just taken charge of the institution, and was going round to acquaint myself with its activities. The majority of the boys had gone home for their summer holidays. Those who had been detained, as was the practice there, were enthusiastically taking me round the place. They were naturally eager to have a close look at the new swami, how he was and what his temperament was. We came to the spot where one of the inmates, who was in standard VI, was recovering from some sickness that had made him bedridden. As a matter of routine, I made anxious inquiries about his health and how he was at the moment. But I did not care to visit him again. Two days later, the swami-in-charge of the Math dispensary there, where the boy was being treated, told me: 'You know, that boy is very excited. It seems you went to see him. He is overwhelmed by your

visit. He thinks that you are a very kind person. He could not contain himself in expressing again and again his gratefulness to you. 'How affectionate the new swami is!' he was repeatedly saying.' 'My goodness!' I exclaimed to myself, 'Me kind! I just *casually* went to see him, and never cared to go and see him again during the next two days. What will he think of me now?' I rushed to see him, but he had already left for his home. I was cursing myself for my carelessness. Two months later, when he returned to the hostel, he was still remembering my visit to him when he was sick.

Tribal Children's Resourcefulness

The tribal children are really creative artists. We have only to give them the suggestion, and they will do the job. This was especially evident at our weekly cultural programmes. Though Saturdays were half working days in the school timetable, the mornings were usually devoted to some cultural events—one-act plays or full-scale dramas, music or dance, quiz programmes, lectures or symposia—prepared by turns by the children of each class, under the guidance of the class teacher, after which we would have a community feast. Everything had to be done by the students and the class teacher. I was always wonderstruck at how they managed to stage everything to perfection. Especially when they had to enact a play written by them or the class teacher, they themselves had to get together whatever was needed—the make-up materials, the screen and other stage equipment, out of what they possessed, with nothing got from outside.

The climax of their efforts was seen at the cultural event we had on the occasion of the inauguration of the second wing of the school building by Mrs Shobha Nehru, of whom mention has already been made. The items they put on display were amazing—a live enactment of a *Panchatantra* story by the kindergarten children, full-scale dramas, *Savitri-Satyavan* by the girls and *Karna* by the boys of the

higher classes. The highlight of the evening was the puppet show *Little Red Riding Hood*. Mrs Shobha Nehru, who hailed from Hungary, the land of puppets, was so impressed and excited that she wanted to send the boy who was the life and soul of the show, one Tara Bini, to Hungary for higher training. He was in standard IV or V. Unfortunately, he was caught in the crossfire of boundary disputes between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh soon after. Just a month after he wrote to me about it, he succumbed to some disease, which could not be diagnosed in time.

Their Presence of Mind

Their ingenuity and presence of mind on the stage was something that we could not but admire and appreciate. Once, for instance, Jerken Gamlin, mentioned earlier, was playing the part of Swami Vivekananda, to whose facial features and physical build-up he had some resemblance, in an eponymous drama depicting some notable anecdotes in the life of Swamiji. It was the time for the enactment of that famous incident in the court of the Alwar Maharaja, where, in order to bring home to him the real significance of idol worship, in which he had no faith, Swamiji asks his dewan to take down his photo hanging on the wall and spit on it. When the dewan and the other courtiers hesitate to do his bidding, Swamiji tells the Maharaja, 'See, Your Highness! This is a mere picture of yours, but it evokes in your subjects the same reverence as if you were present there in flesh and blood. So is the case with image worship.' In the drama that was being enacted, this Jerken Gamlin asked at the appropriate time for the photo to be brought down. What was his consternation and surprise when he suddenly found there was no photo—the boys who were in charge of stage management had just forgotten to put the picture there on the wall. It was an awkward situation. But the boy was not flurried in the least. He could sing melodiously, even as Swami Vivekananda could. He quietly sat down in the

familiar meditation pose of Swami Vivekananda, and began to sing a song that Swami Vivekananda must have sung several times before his *guru* Sri Ramakrishna, and the curtains were immediately drawn. He did it all so naturally, as if it were all part of the original story. No one could guess what had gone wrong, except the few who were in the know of things.

The Right Attitude towards Service

There were also moments when we felt disturbed and disheartened by the attitude of the children. Such feelings are not peculiar to us alone. Even great souls become subject to them sometimes. One day in particular I had been feeling very bad about the behaviour of the children. I came back to my quarters in that mood and opened the daily mail. The latest issue of the Bengali magazine of the Order, *Udbodhan*, was there. I opened the page—as I always did—in which the reminiscences of Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj, a direct sannyasin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, used to appear. That number of the magazine described the following incident from his life.

He was a pioneer in our work for the poor. The orphanage he started more than a century back for the Santhal tribal children has grown into a big institution now. One day he was utterly disgusted and frustrated by the behaviour of the boys in the orphanage, and was telling himself in a monotone: 'I do so much for them, and they care a tuppence for me. They are more concerned with the cook than me!' Hardly had these thoughts crossed his mind, when he had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna asked him: 'Gangadhar (that was the swami's pre-monastic name)! What did you say?' The swami repeated himself. Sri Ramakrishna asked him: 'For whom have you renounced everything—parents, relatives, friends and all?' The swami said: 'For *your* sake!' 'And at whose behest have you started this work?' 'Who else? At the behest of Naren (Swami Vivekananda's

pre-monastic name)! Sri Ramakrishna said: 'You have renounced everything for *my* sake! And you are doing all these things for *Naren's* sake! Then, why do you say: *I* do so much for *these boys*? You are doing nothing for them, according to your own confession! Why do you forget it?' 'Was it not the same with us, too?' I thought, and I was my normal self immediately.

What Do Children Need from Us?

Finally, what do the children expect from us? *Nothing except our love and affection*, as one boy wrote to me immediately after I had left Along for good. While talking of Tumken Bagra I narrated how a group of boys had left our school in a huff. It was all a case of misunderstanding. For some reason, *they* felt that we did not have the necessary affection for them.

And *we* thought they were not very responsive to our efforts to improve them. Tami Rumi, whom I have mentioned earlier, was one of them. Hearing that I was leaving Along, he had gone to the school to bid me goodbye. But I had already left. He wrote remorsefully a three-page letter at the end of which were these lines: 'I went to see you off at the school. How unfortunate I could not meet you, Swamiji! I tried my best to conquer *your* love during the years I stayed with you, but without success. (He had mistaken my harsh admonition to study harder as lack of love on my part.) Now at least, Swamiji, I do not want any long sermon from you! Just write these three words on a piece of a paper: '*I LOVE YOU*', and send them to me.' Was he not voicing the wish of all the children when he said that? I think so. *

God's Embroidery

When I was a little boy, my mother used to embroider a great deal. I would sit at her knee and look up from the floor and ask what she was doing. She informed me that she was embroidering. I told her that it looked like a mess from where I was. As from the underside I watched her work within the boundaries of the little round hoop that she held in her hand, I complained to her that it sure looked messy from where I sat.

She would smile at me, look down and gently say, 'My son, you go about your playing for a while, and when I am finished with my embroidering, I will put you on my knee and let you see it from my side.' I would wonder why she was using some dark threads along with the bright ones and why they seemed so jumbled from my view.

A few minutes would pass and then I would hear Mother's voice say, 'Son, come and sit on my knee.' This I did only to be surprised and thrilled to see a beautiful flower or a sunset. I could not believe it, because from underneath it looked so messy. Then Mother would say to me, 'My son, from underneath it did look messy and jumbled, but you did not realize that there was a pre-drawn plan on the top. It was a design. I was only following it. Now look at it from my side and you will see what I was doing.'

Many times through the years I have looked up to my Heavenly Father and said, 'Father, what are You doing?' He has answered, 'I am embroidering your life.' I say, 'But it looks like a mess to me. It seems so jumbled. The threads seem so dark. Why can't they all be bright?'

The Father seems to tell me, 'My child, you go about your business of doing My business, and one day I will bring you to Heaven and put you on My knee and you will see the plan from My side.'

In South America: Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

(continued from the previous issue)

Buenos Aires

On 5 June we left the São Paulo ashrama early in the morning and took the flight to Buenos Aires, Argentina's capital. After a two-hour flight, we reached Buenos Aires at 10:45 am. Many devotees, young and old, were present at the airport. After a 45-minute drive, we reached our ashrama at Bella Vista, a suburb of Buenos Aires. Swami Vijayanandaji started this ashrama in 1941. He had worked hard to build up this centre.

In spite of its rich resources and a small population (only 36,125,000), Argentina has

been held to ransom by corrupt politicians. The economic condition is terrible. People from villages are migrating to the cities and living in ever-expanding slums. Industries are closing down. If you deposit money in banks, you cannot withdraw it! So people queue up at banks to convert their pesos (Argentinean currency) into US dollars. All these are clear indications that man himself is responsible for his joys and sorrows.

The weather was quite cold on the 6th morning, but improved as the day advanced. Nevertheless, at 9:30 am we went to the basilica at Luján (pronounced 'Lukan'), 45 minutes from Bella Vista ashrama. It is a big church dedicated to Mother Mary. There is a story behind this basilica.

The story of the Virgin of Luján begins in 1630 when Farias, a Portuguese gentleman in Santiago del Estero (one of the Argentinean provinces), wished to construct a chapel where Virgin Mary could be worshipped. Farias asked his friend Andrea Juan, a sailor, to send him an image purchased from one of the famous shops that existed at the time in São Paulo. His friend answered by sending him two images: of Mary the Immaculate and of the Virgin with the Child. After reaching Buenos Aires by boat, the caravan went on a way that bordered the right bank of the Luján river. On the morning of the third day they could not proceed anymore since the cart carrying the images could not move further, no matter how many different oxen were yoked to it. Then, after repeated efforts, the intrigued men decided to put down the box that contained the image of Mary the Immaculate, after which the cart moved without any prob-



Luján basilica

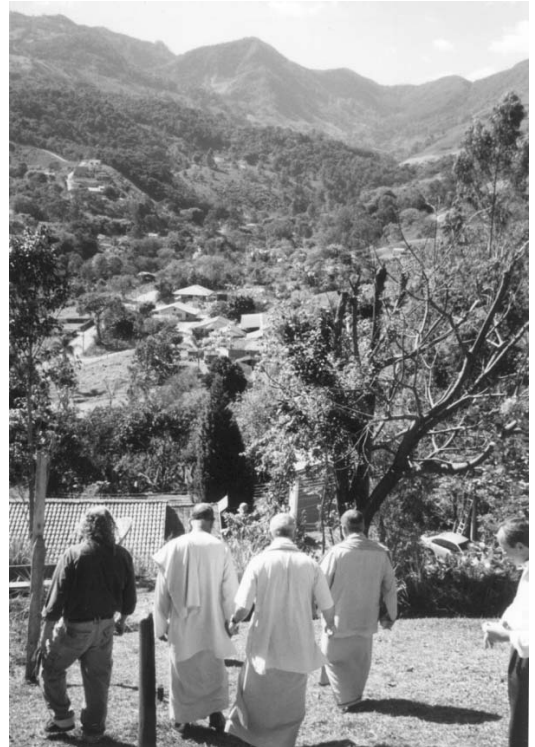
lem. Those who were conducting the caravan understood that God wished this image to stay on in that area. This has come to be known as the 'Luján miracle'. The image was then taken to the nearest farmer's house. People learnt of the miracle and started making a beeline to the place to adore Mary. Then the farmer erected a small chapel and enshrined the image there. A young slave from Africa, Manuel by name, served the Virgin for about fifty years. Many miracles occurred during this period, particularly related to cure of diseases. As this area became less populated, apprehensive of damage to the image by the local Indians, the image was shifted in 1671 to another farm in the area of the actual city of Luján. There the image was known as the Virgin of Luján, the name derived from the nearby river by name Luján. In 1875 a French priest was posted to Luján. He was asked to do some work with the native Indians. But they accused him of spreading disease and condemned him to be speared to death. Then he prayed to the Virgin of Luján and promised that if he was saved, he would write her history, install her image and build a temple in her honour. Soon after these thoughts crossed his mind, one of the Indians came forward and offered him protection. Thus began the story of the construction of the Luján cathedral. The following measurements will give an idea about this basilica's size: height of the towers: 106.05 m (355 ft); maximum height inside: 68.5 m (226 ft); length from the entrance to the sacristy: 97m (323 ft).

In the evening we visited our city centre. It is a small two-storeyed building in a narrow street. It could hardly accommodate 50 persons. But since the programme had been announced well in advance, the attendance was more than expected: some 110 people congregated that day. The lecture was on 'Sri Ramakrishna's Message to the Modern World'. People sat or stood wherever they could—on the staircase and in the adjoining rooms. On the first floor there are three rooms; Swami

Pareshananda stays in one of them occasionally. We returned to Bella Vista by 9:30 pm.

Next morning, the weather was good and the sky very clear. We went to downtown Buenos Aires to see the river Rio de Laplata. The city is on its banks. It is perhaps the widest expanse of fresh water in a river delta in the world. The river is nearly 50 km broad. One cannot see its other bank. At 3:30 pm along with some devotees, we went to Tigre, a tourist spot on the many inlets of the river. There are many islands formed at the confluence of the rivers Uruguay and Parana. We went for a boat ride on the river. On either side are beautiful houses owned by rich people, who visit the place during weekends or holidays for a short stay and enjoy boating, surfing and the like.

On the 8th morning, I was taken round the town of Bella Vista. It is a quiet suburb with well laid-out houses. Many houses are



On the way to Tigre River

put up for sale, but there are no takers! The adjacent town of San Miguel is bigger. The place also has some high-rise buildings. In the afternoon we left for Buenos Aires again where, in a building belonging to our centre, functions an institution named Pratibha Foundation. They have rented this three-storeyed building from our centre. A lady by name Siva Ma started this organization. She died at a young age of 58. Since she was very influential, the institution attracted many devotees as long as she lived. Not many people come now, but the institution keeps functioning. I spoke there on 'Spiritual Practice: Obstacles and Solutions'. There were about 170 persons. After supper, we returned to the ashrama by 9:30 pm.

9 June, Sunday: The day broke with cloudy skies. The main public function was scheduled for today. From the morning devotees started arriving. Volunteers had made arrangements. With a cold wind blowing, the function had to be held indoors. At noon nearly 100 people had lunch. At 4 pm the

meeting began with some Spanish devotional songs on Sri Ramakrishna and Santa Madre (Holy Mother). Nearly 230 devotees attended, including many old disciples of Swami Vidyayanandaji. Some people sat in the shrine, where a closed-circuit television had been installed. Swamis Pareshananda and Nirmalatmananda spoke for 5 minutes each. That was followed by my 50-minute speech plus translation. Swami Arunananda is proficient in five languages, and he did the translation. The subject of the talk was 'Sri Ramakrishna for the Modern Age'. There were questions and answers for some 20 minutes. Some devotees had come from far-off places; there was a gentleman from Patagonia, in the deep south of the South American continent. I would like to mention here about the painting of Holy Mother's picture by a lady devotee named Mrs Angelica Lancheari. A black and white copy is reproduced here.

Uruguay

On 10th morning, Swamis Pareshananda, Nirmalatmananda, Arunananda and I left for the city airport on the banks of the river to take the flight to Monte Video, the capital of Uruguay. The duration of the flight was just 25 minutes! Scheduled to leave at 8:45 am, the flight got postponed to 11:45 am and then again to 2:45 pm! Nearly 15 devotees waited all through and bade us farewell while some others left after waiting for about three hours. We had to manage the lunch with cookies and soft drinks. Finally, we reached Monte Video at 3:20 pm. Had we taken the boat we would have had a pleasant ride on the river. That would have taken about 1½ hours from Buenos Aires to Monte Video. At Monte Video airport some devotees were present. We reached our hotel after an hour's ride and were lodged at Hotel Ermitage. From there we walked up to Maria Olga's house nearby for tea and snacks. At 7:30 pm the meeting began in the mezzanine floor of the hotel. As against the expected 40 people, some 90 were present. After



Holy Mother by Angelica Lancheari

speaking for 50 minutes, I answered some questions. Swami Arunananda translated everything sentence by sentence. The audience was quite attentive. We went again to Maria's house for supper and returned to the hotel for a night's rest.

Uruguay is the smallest country in South America. The spoken language is Spanish. The population is just 3.3 million, out of which nearly 30% lives in Buenos Aires. Once a province of Brazil, Uruguay became independent in August 1825.

After breakfast on the 11th morning, at 9:45 am we left by car for La Paloma, 238 km north of Monte Video. We could reach there only at 1 pm. We were lodged at Bahai Hotel. After getting accustomed to crowds in India, the countryside in these countries appears almost unpopulated. For miles and miles, you don't see a human being, except for an occasional car moving up or down. At La Paloma, we headed for Hebbe Hesse's house. She is an old lady, initiated by Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, twelfth President of our Order. We had our lunch at her house. Other devotees like Tamar and Devi joined us to make things easy. They run a small ashrama called Sarada Ashrama. At Hebbe's house, after tea, I answered some questions from devotees. Then we left for Roche, a small town 30 km away, where in a hall belonging to a club a meeting had been arranged. Nearly 90 people were present. I spoke on 'The Relevance of Yoga and Vedanta for the Modern Age'.

Next morning was quite cold and windy. I heard the temperature was 0°C. In spite of that, after breakfast at the hotel, a devotee by name Leonardo drove us to a less windy place. He is very much interested in Vedanta. There we had a walk for half an hour. I saw the Sarada Ashrama run by lady devotees. They told

me that they were in need of spiritual guidance. It is kept going by Hebbe Hesse, her daughter Tamar and others. After lunch we left for Monte Video airport, 210 km away. The flight was on time and we arrived at São Paulo at 7.40 pm. Many devotees met us at the airport.

São Paulo Again

On 13 June the weather was good. Compared to the cold weather of Uruguay, São Paulo was quite warm. We had a quiet day. Slowly I started organizing things for the long return journey home. In the afternoon we went to the Ibirapuera park. In the park many men and women were walking, running and skating.

After evening arati, followed by meditation, I talked to the devotees for a while.

Next morning we all left for Sao Bento Sapukai town, in the district of St Antonio de Pinhal. It is more than 200 km away. The region is mountainous and quite beautiful. It is also the home of rare orchids. Here Radha and Govinda, two initiated devotees, have built a house on a 25,000 sq m plot (6 acres). There is a nice shrine, where about 60 people can sit. There is a separate small building to accommodate any visiting swami. An orchard with



A view of Sao Bento Sapukai

oranges and other fruit trees—all thoughtfully grown on the mountainside with a murmuring small stream flowing by and forests all around—make the place very charming. A whole-day retreat had been planned, including an evening lecture in the local club. Devotees from São Paulo, Curitiba, Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro had come to attend the retreat. We reached the place at 11:50 am. After lunch and rest, we attended arati at the shrine at 4:10 pm. Then we left for Clube Social Hall, where an audience of 150 was present. I spoke on 'Eternal Values for Modern Man'. Swami Nirmalatmananda and other swamis also spoke briefly. Arunananda translated. The response was good. Though the people had not heard anything about Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji, still they posed some intelligent questions. We returned to São Paulo by 9:30 pm.

Next day, the whole morning was spent talking to devotees. The topics ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous. At 5 pm there was a sort of farewell meeting. Some devotees—Dr Boris, Jandir, Louis Antonio, Sushana and Gobind—spoke briefly. Swami Nirmalatmananda, Pareshananda, Arunananda also spoke and I spoke on 'Spiritualizing Domestic Life' and bade them all goodbye. The place was packed with nearly a hundred people.

June 16. Morning was spent in packing and talking with devotees. We left for the international airport by 3:30 pm. Nearly 35 devotees came to see me off—an emotional farewell! They were all present till I entered into the immigration lounge. The plane journey to Johannesburg was long and tedious. Taking off from São Paulo at 6:30 pm on the 16th, I reached Johannesburg on the 17th at 7:30 am

(South African time, five hours ahead of Brazil), 25 minutes before schedule. The flight took 8½ hours. Swami Saradananda (of Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Durban), Dr Sebran, also of Durban, and Harshadbhai and Arvindbhai, of Johannesburg, met me at the airport. Clearance at immigration and customs counters took some time. We reached Harshadbhai's house in Lenasia. After bath and breakfast, I tried to have a nap, but without success. The 'no jet-lag' tablet apparently had not worked! In the afternoon, I gave a private class on the *Katha Upanishad* to Saradananda, Harshadbhai and one or two others. In the evening we had dinner at Arvindabhai's house. It was quite cold outside. Sleep was eluding me!

Next morning, I left for the airport to board the flight to Mumbai. Swami Saradananda and Harshadbhai saw me off. Another tedious flight of 8½ hours! I landed at Mumbai at 12:20 am (midnight) on the 19th and reached Belur Math in the evening.

It appears that in times to come the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda would be more and more accepted in Latin America. We will need to send more swamis to different parts of that continent. In countries like Chile, Peru and Bolivia also people would be interested in Vedanta and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Of course, learning the local language—Spanish in all the countries except Brazil, where Portuguese is spoken—is essential. Being Catholics, the people of Latin America are devoted to Virgin Mary. So love and devotion to Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi comes to them spontaneously. Let us hope that in the twenty-first century Latin America would become a stronghold of the Ramakrishna Movement! *

The Guide

The nervous tourist was afraid to get too close to the cliff. 'What could I do,' he asked the guide, 'if I fall over the edge?' 'In that case sir,' said the guide enthusiastically, 'don't fail to look to the right. You'll love the view.'

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita*

SWAMI ATULANANDA

Introduction

[A major part of this introduction is from Swami Vidyatmananda's Introduction to Atman Alone Abides, published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. We are grateful to them for their kind permission to reproduce the matter here. —Editor]

Gurudas Maharaj was a Hollander who became a sannyasin of the Ramakrishna Order under the name of Swami Atulananda, and obtained recognition for his spiritual excellences. Swami Atulananda, familiarly known as Gurudas Maharaj, was born in 1870, the son of a prosperous merchant in Amsterdam. His early name was Cornelius J Heijblom. After graduation from an agricultural college he migrated to the United States before the turn of the century, and lived around New York City,

earning his livelihood as an office worker and at times as a coachman or farmhand. In 1898 he came in contact with the Vedanta movement inaugurated by Swami Vivekananda, whom he met briefly in 1899 and 1900. Following his contact with Swami Abhedananda in 1898, he lived in intimate relation with him and with other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who worked in the West, especially



Gurudas (late 1890s)

Swami Turiyananda, with whom he stayed as a pioneer in the building of Shanti Ashrama in California.

Dissatisfaction with his own Protestant brand of Christianity induced Gurudas Maharaj to take to Vedanta very quickly and earnestly. As he said, 'It was as though a sudden revelation had opened up. I knew all at once that this was truth.' He received initiation into brahmacharya, the preparatory stage for becoming a monk, from Swami Abhedananda, who gave him the name of Gu-

rudas. After living a sort of quasi-monastic life in America for a few years, he came to India to live in 1906; but faced with the problems of adjusting to Indian conditions of life, he soon fell ill and had to return to the West at the end of two years. He tried India again in 1911-16, with the same result. He was initiated by Holy Mother in India in 1911. After returning to the United States in 1912 he again lived at Shanti

Ashrama during 1913 and 1914. We think he must have written this commentary during this time he stayed at the Ashrama.

We know from Sarah Fox's letters that Gurudas Maharaj gave classes at the home of the Fox sisters in Berkeley. He also held weekly meetings of Vedanta students at their home in Oakland between 1919 and 1922. We do not know for sure what text was taken up in these classes, but we feel from internal evidence in this commentary on the *Bhagavadgita* that it was used by Gurudas Maharaj for a class. We think it is possible that it was the text for classes given at Miss Fox's house sometime between 1919 and 1922. The commentary begins with Chapter 7 of the *Gita*, as though this class was given as a continuation of a class on the *Gita* that had already been started.

Sometime in 1922 at one of the meetings at the Oakland house of the Fox sisters, Gurudas Maharaj suggested that Sarah and her sister Rebecca go with him and Swami Prakashanandaji to India. In November of 1922 Swami Prakashanandaji did go to India accompanied by Gurudas Maharaj and the Fox sisters. The sisters stayed till January of 1926. Gurudas Maharaj stayed in India for the rest of his life.

This time with the wisdom born of experience, he did not try to be completely Indian in diet and way of life. He devised a mean between Western and Indian modes of life which

enabled him to live in India to the end.

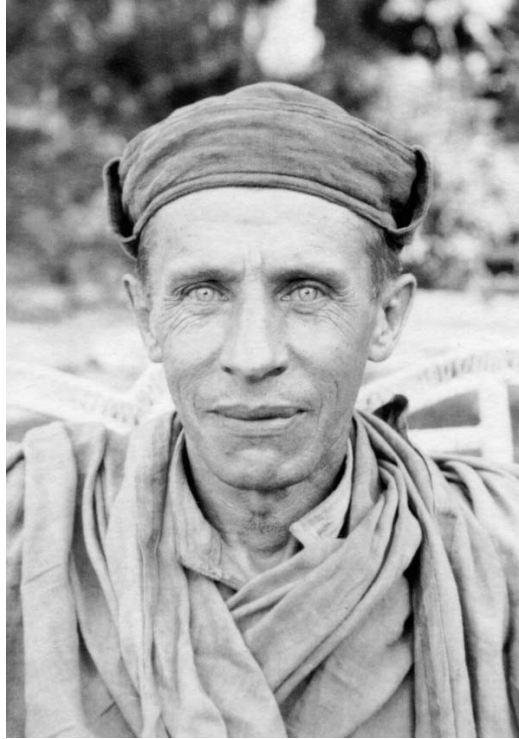
He was initiated into sannyasa at the Belur monastery in 1923 by Swami Abhedananda. Earlier he had had his mantra *diksha* (initiation into mantra) from Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother. He spent his time mostly at Kankhal during winter and at the hill station Barlowgunj, near Mussourie, at other times, till his demise in 1966 at the age of ninety-six. He had a large circle of friends among lay devotees and his monastic associates, who held

him in high esteem for his dedication to the spiritual ideal.

The one idea that sustained Gurudas Maharaj all through his life, including his last days when he suffered from a painful cancer near the eye, was the Vedantic doctrine: 'I am the Atman. Everything else changes. The Atman alone abides.' He was in a sense the first Westerner to adopt monasticism under the Ramakrishna Order. Although there were two or three Americans who took to monastic life in Swami Vivekananda's time, they dropped out soon after.

Gurudas Maharaj on the other hand stuck to monastic life till the end in such complete identification with Vedantic ideals that he received the recognition and admiration of his fellow monastics. He is therefore a guide and inspiration for the now numerous Westerners who have become members of the Ramakrishna Order.

Gurudas Maharaj enjoyed a close associ-



Atulananda (Almora 1924)

ation with numerous direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. In addition to Swami Vivekananda and Holy Mother, he was fortunate enough to see all the disciples of the Great Master except Swami Yogananda and Swami Niranjanananda, both of whom had passed away before his coming to India. He passed away at Kankhal Sevashrama in August 1966.

Several years ago this carefully handwritten and corrected book (commentary)

was found in the archival vault of the Vedanta Society of Northern California in San Francisco. It was wrapped up with pictures of both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Turiyananda and with the old flag that had been used at the Meditation Cabin in Shanti Ashrama. We are grateful to Pravrajika Sevaprana of Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, for making the text available to *Prabuddha Bharata*.

Chapter 7: Path of Wisdom and Realization

With the sixth chapter was concluded the first part of the *Gita*, that part which more especially deals with the individual soul and its path towards freedom through karma or action. We now enter on the middle section of the *Gita* dealing with devotion or bhakti as a means to reach the universal Spirit. The *Gita* has sometimes been called the divine bird that carries in its flight to the abode of eternal Peace those who accept its service and who lovingly cling to it. The first part of the *Gita* is the bird's left wing, the last part its right wing, and the middle section (the subject of our present study) is called its tail, by which the bird steers its course, avoiding dangers and obstacles on its way. As the bird's flight becomes very uncertain and unsteady when it is deprived of its tail, so our spiritual progress, be it through karma or wisdom, is subject to many dangers and pitfalls, if not backed and steadied by love and devotion.

Needed an All-round Character

The object of Vedanta is to point out the way by which man may become perfect and develop an all-around character, strong, active, wise and loving. Most persons have a leaning towards one particular phase of religion. They follow *one* of the paths (be it as workers or thinkers or ritualists) to the exclusion of the other phases of Truth, and often, unfortunately, depreciating the ways of fellow religionists. The karma yogi entirely de-

voted to work, often depreciates the meditative tendency of the jnani, confounding the long hours of meditation with a state of idle inactivity, and looking upon the devotion of the bhakta as so much time lost in useless practices. The bhakta again sometimes refuses all reason and logic, regarding faith as the only true means to salvation. While the jnani, depending on knowledge, often looks upon karma yoga and bhakti yoga alike as inferior forms of religion.

Love, Wisdom and Activity Must Go Hand in Hand

Swami Vivekananda has said that though 'faith' is a wonderful insight and fully sufficient to save man, it is beset with the danger of breeding fanaticism and thus barring further progress. Jnana, in itself all right, may run into dry intellectualism; and love, great and noble as it is, may die away in meaningless sentimentalism. A harmony of faith, wisdom and devotion is what is required. It is a rare attainment. But ever and anon great men appear endowed with such a harmonious, balanced, perfect character. Sri Krishna, the author of the *Gita*, was the greatest living illustration of this idea. When Vedanta speaks of the follower of a certain yoga, we must always understand that the true yogi, though perhaps more pronounced in the embodiment of one of the three main yogas, is always endowed with all of them. Love and wisdom and activ-

ity must go hand in hand. Then progress is assured. And when we speak of the three sections of the *Gita* dealing with karma, bhakti, and jnana respectively, we must not forget that in each section the three yogas receive due attention, that they are intermingled always, and that in their highest perfection, all distinctions vanish, and the realization (the culmination of all the yogas) is the same in all. 'Of the cows of different colours, the milk is of one colour only. The wise man regards wisdom like unto milk, but its forms, like unto the cows,' says the *Amritabindu Upanishad*.¹

All Yogas Equally Important

In the first six chapters we have seen how karma truly performed includes bhakti. The path of work includes intense love for God. As the devoted servant fulfils the duties of a loving master to the very best of his ability and with the thought of pleasing his master, so the karma yogi works not for personal benefit, but with his heart fixed on God, he offers at His feet both his works and the results. And through this devoted service, God and the devotee approach each other. As God comes nearer, light and wisdom envelop His servant. And by that light, wisdom is born and the devotee, identifying himself with the soul of all life, is filled with unspeakable love, seeing his true Self reflected in all beings.

And as we proceed with this middle section of the *Gita*, dealing with Bhakti, we shall see that faith must be accompanied by work. A bhakta cannot sit down in idleness. His love will express itself in service. As he proceeds, understanding will clear his mind, and wisdom will illumine his intellect; *thus*, knowledge will increase his devotion for God.

It is clear then that we cannot afford to neglect any of the yogas, that by accepting them all and applying them in our life *alone*, we shall be able to walk steadily in the path that leads to freedom.

This seventh chapter is called 'Jnana Vijnana Yoga', or the Path of Wisdom and Re-

alization. Led step by step by Sri Krishna we have now reached the position of the highest yoga. In the last verse of the sixth chapter Sri Krishna said: 'Among all the yogis, to Me he is the highest, who, with his inner Self absorbed in Me, worships Me with unflinching faith.'² That is the conclusion, the summing up, of all that has gone before. Arjuna was in sorrow and despondent. This terrible project before him—he in a way responsible for the horrible slaughter of human life about to take place—had troubled and confused his mind. Emotion and sentiment overruled his reason and he was about to withdraw from the battlefield, thinking thereby to escape a great sin, a cruel and passionate deed. Sri Krishna convinced him of his folly, presenting before him Truth in its different forms. Ignorance is the cause of all human suffering. Wisdom or Truth is the remedy. But hearing the Truth alone will not suffice. Truth must be understood and practised. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, by repeating the word medicine, the disease will not be cured. The medicine must be swallowed for it to take effect. And in the Upanishads we find the same idea expressed when it is said that Truth must first be heard, then meditated upon and then realized. By meditation Vedanta means not only the act of concentrating the mind seated in a certain posture, but also making Truth practical, carrying it out in our life and actions. This same process Sri Krishna expounds in the *Gita*. So after communicating the Truth to Arjuna He teaches him how to apply it in *his* condition of life. 'Pleasure and pain, victory and defeat regard alike, and then engage in the battle, so shalt thou not commit sin.' (2.38)

The first step then is work with discrimination. That leads to purification of the mind. Thus, the mind is prepared for jnana, or wisdom. With jnana comes renunciation and meditation. This process has been expounded in the first six chapters. And the seventh chapter continues the subject putting, as it were, the crown on all that has proceeded, by declaring

the path of wisdom and realization. The ideal has been placed before us. 'Among all the yogis, to Me *he* is the highest, who, with his inner Self absorbed in Me, worships Me with unflinching faith.' (6.47) The question, then, is how can we worship God with faith, our soul resting in Him? How can we cultivate that faith, how can we train our mind that it may be contented to rest in God?

Knowledge brings love, faith and devotion. We cannot put our entire trust in a stranger. As long as God is a stranger to us, our

faith and devotion can be only half-hearted, and will at times be interrupted by doubts and misgivings. We must know God to be able to put our faith in Him. Our mind will rest satisfied only in that which we know and love. How encouraging, how welcome, therefore, sounds the opening verse of the seventh chapter, where Sri Krishna seems to anticipate Arjuna's difficulty in this respect. We read:

1. The Blessed Lord said: Hear, O son of Pritha, how without doubt thou shalt know Me fully, practising yoga with thy mind fixed in Me and taking refuge in Me.

This is a great and wonderful promise that the Lord makes to Arjuna. 'Hear, how you shall know Me fully.' Doubt not; believe My word. I am going to tell you all about Myself, that knowing Me, you may truly love Me and become entirely devoted to me. But you must practise yoga. That is, you must make your mind strong and steady and then fixing your mind on Me, you must take refuge in Me. Those who want material prosperity may follow the rules laid down in the shastras for that purpose, rules regarding austerities, sacrifices, vows and so on. But those who want to know Me in My infinite greatness and power and grace, must come to Me. They must abide with Me, then gradually all their doubts will vanish as they come to know Me fully.

It is a common experience of the devotee that one moment he is filled with faith, hope and security; he seems to understand and he is satisfied, but again he forgets. The mind becomes confused, early experiences are forgotten or they are doubted as to their value and nature. The mind wavers and loses faith.

Therefore we must practise love, devotion and intense attachment for the Lord. This is called yoga. This will make our faith strong and enduring.

Depending on the Lord, recognizing Him as our refuge, as our saviour, as the end and aim of our hopes and aspirations, we must try to feel the presence of God at all times, even during our various activities. That is practising yoga. It is our first duty as declared in the opening verse of this chapter. *Then*, God's promise will be fulfilled in us; we will know God. We will realize the Truth. Sri Ramakrishna met God face to face. He knew his Divine Mother more intimately than we know our dearest friends. And the Vedas declare that we shall know God in just as real a sense as we know a fruit we hold in our hands. *This* then must be what Sri Krishna means when He promises to reveal Himself fully, that He will give to His devotee the realization of His Being. Sri Krishna promises to declare to Arjuna knowledge and realization. And mark how He speaks in praise of that knowledge.

2. I shall declare unto thee, without reserve, this Knowledge as well as its realization, having known which nothing more here (on earth) remains to be known.

Listen attentively, for I—the Lord, 'in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge'—am going to teach you without reserve the great mystery of My Being. Not

only mere information shall I give you, but also the realization of My words. Having obtained that knowledge, there is nothing here on earth that remains unknown to you. As I re-

veal the Truth to you, My words will carry conviction. And not only that, they will be a revelation to you. They will illumine your understanding; a new mystical consciousness will open up before you. You will enter new realms of wisdom. You will come face to face with Truth; nay, you will enter into and *become* Truth. Becoming Truth—that is realization, *that* is samadhi. That is the kind of wisdom that I shall communicate to you. Then you will understand what is meant by omniscience. Not that you will enter into the knowledge of every detail of life and worldly interests. No. You will know *yourself* for the first time. And knowing *yourself*, you will realize that nothing else is worth knowing. That is omniscience, to know your own divine Self. With that realization will come the knowledge that all else is but a dream—a strange, wonderful delusion, a passing experience, not worthy of any further consideration.

I will draw you unto Myself, and you will know that you and I are one. That will be the

end of all your striving and the consummation of all your desires. You will realize that there is nothing more to be known. As waking from a horrid dream we are satisfied to be awake and do not care about the details of the dreams, how such and such a thing could happen during the dream, so all these worldly concerns will lose their interest for you when once you wake up from this delusion of maya.

The words of Lord Krishna are full of force. He knows. He relates His own experience. It is only when we speak from experience that our words carry weight and conviction, that we have the power to impress the teaching on the mind of the hearer. Sri Krishna had great love for Arjuna. He wanted to help him out of his delusion. And because there was this love and sincere desire to help, the instruction took effect.

The knowledge that Sri Krishna communicates is productive of great results and therefore it is very hard to obtain. How is that? Listen to what Sri Krishna says:

3. Among thousands of human beings, scarcely one strives for perfection, and among the blessed ones who thus strive after perfection, scarcely one knows Me in truth.

This seems a hard saying. Of course, we know from our worldly experiences that whatever is of great value is difficult to attain. And we also know that very few persons succeed in attaining the fullness of their ambitions. How many strive to become rich and how many succeed? How many strive to excel in art, in science, in music, on the stage? We all want to reach the top. But there seems to be room for very few when it comes to the highest attainment. Experts, masters of their art, are one or two among thousands of their colleagues. Everywhere many are called, but few are chosen. But that need not discourage us. We must try anyhow, in the hope that in the end we shall succeed. And even though we may not hope to reach the very highest success, still there is satisfaction in following in the train of those who have the same ambition. Every effort towards a noble end is a reward in

itself. If it is so in worldly matters, how much more so is it in things spiritual! *There* the goal is the very highest. And every step towards that goal is a blessing in itself. We strive for worldly attainment, which ends when life is over. How much more should we strive for spiritual success which is eternal and where no labour is ever lost? Sri Krishna says, 'Even little attempts for a spiritual life, bring wonderful results.' (2.40) We are all travelling towards the one Goal; and until that Goal is reached we shall find no rest. We may delay life after life, but the time must come that we will strive in full earnest for perfection and for the knowledge of God. Every step advanced is so much gain. That effort is carried over to the next life. Then we begin where we left off in our last life. There is therefore no reason to feel discouraged. What we have done in *this* life, need not be done over in the future. That much

is finished. That much nearer we are to the goal.

It is a great thing even to strive after God-vision. Our very attempt is the result of good karma acquired in a past life. Sri Krishna calls those who seek for freedom *siddhas*, which literally means the perfected ones. It is a 'great attainment even to long after God.' It means that we have entered the race. 'Know ye not,' says St Paul, 'that they which run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize. So run, that ye may obtain.'

But what do we find? 'Among thousands of persons, scarcely one strives for perfection,' says Sri Krishna. Who cares for Truth? We are more like animals. We live in the senses. We do not care for religion. We want health and prosperity and good times. But we do not care for God. Yes, compared with the ordinary man, those few who sincerely seek after Truth are perfect. They have abandoned their evil ways and entered the race and they must reach the goal sooner or later. It is a great thing to have made a beginning, to have turned our face towards that supreme Goal, which is Knowledge and the realization of God in all His fullness. Indeed, having attained *that*, nothing else remains worthy of attainment. The entire universe slinks away as if in shame when the beauty of the divine and lovable Mother of the Universe has been witnessed.

Who is worthy, who is deserving of this sublime treasure? Who can say from the bottom of his heart, 'Yes, I deserve realization; I have renounced all there is to be renounced in exchange for God'? Very few indeed, but some there are. Those are the chosen ones. Chosen because they themselves choose. It is their own supreme effort that made them winners of the race. Never tired of training, never tired of labouring, they win the prize. 'The disciple is not above his master; but everyone that is perfect, shall be as his master.' That is the crown of success. 'Be ye perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.' Be free; know that you are one with God. Realize the highest

Truth.

And when we labour under the consciousness of our own weakness and unworthiness and inability to put up a worthy fight, let us remember Jesus' answer to the faint-hearted who exclaimed after hearing his remark that it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter unto the Kingdom of God: 'Who then can be saved?' Jesus answered unto them: 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.'

That kind of faith we must practise. The strong will believe in their own strength. And thus they will run for the prize. The weak will trust in God, that He will give them the strength to run the race to a good end. For 'through His grace the dumb becomes eloquent, the lame crosses the mountain,' says the Meditation on the *Gita*. He, the Almighty, is always ready and willing to shelter those who ask for His protection.

Have we ever stopped to think what a wonderful privilege it is to be born a human being? *These* three are hard to attain, says Shankaracharya: first, human birth; second, the aspiration after Truth; third, the company of a realized soul. Think of what an infinitesimally small percentage of life is represented by human beings. Compare the number of human souls with all the souls of lower evolution: animals, birds, insects and plant life. And to that very small percentage we belong. That is a great attainment. We have reached the highest point of physical evolution. It is only after reaching *this* stage that longing after Truth becomes at all possible. It is only as *man* that we can get free. Even the gods, who live in higher spheres, enjoying the fruit of their good deeds, will have to take human birth again to work out their salvation. The human life is the life of the greatest possibilities. The brute and the god meet in man. Man can follow the one or the other. It is in this world that pleasure and pain are mixed. And man is shaken every once in a while to the very depths of his being,

thus meeting with himself, thus coming face to face with his own soul, with his own condition. Thus, every now and then he is roused from the intoxication that constant enjoyment brings over him. If, after gaining at last a human birth and in that birth the knowledge of the teaching, we do not follow that teaching, then we are unfortunate indeed. Then we are like the suicide who, having the means to preserve his life, rejects them and brings about his own destruction. Therefore we should strive

sincerely while we have the opportunity.

Because this wisdom of which the Lord promises to speak is so deep, so sublime and so difficult to attain, therefore the Lord Himself declares it so. Who can know the godly nature and attributes better than Sri Krishna Himself, the Lord incarnate? He is the fit teacher of humanity. *He* can declare the Truth.

And now having prepared the hearer for the teaching by inducing in him a taste for it, the Lord proceeds thus, revealing His own nature:

4. Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and egoism—thus is My Prakriti divided eightfold.

5. This Prakriti is inferior, but different from this, know thou, O mighty-armed, is My higher Prakriti, the Self-conscious life principle, by which this universe is sustained.

Sri Krishna has promised to teach Arjuna *that* knowledge which includes all knowledge, 'knowing which nothing else remains to be known.' (7.2) Who or what is *That*, knowing which we know everything? It must be the one, all-inclusive Being. It must be the knowledge of Him, who *is* everything, outside of whom nothing exists. And so it is. The whole universe and whatever there may be beyond the universe, heavens and hells and all spheres of existence can be reduced to *one* Unity. That one Unity comprises all there is: matter, mind, soul and Spirit. And that is called God. Knowing Him, we know the sum total of all that is, was or ever will be. Nothing exists outside of Him. God is *in* all, He *penetrates* all, He is all.

It is about God that Sri Krishna speaks. Who is God and what is God? That is the question that Sri Krishna will solve. All that can be told of God, Sri Krishna will tell Arjuna without reserve, leaving out nothing. By God here is meant not the absolute Brahman, of whom nothing can be predicated, but God in His personal aspect, Ishvara, the creator, preserver and dissolver of the universe.

Ishvara as known and considered from the human standpoint has a twofold nature. His inferior nature is the universe in all its forms, gross and subtle. It is divided eightfold:

earth, water, fire, air, ether (in their gross and subtle states), mind, intellect and egoism. The five elements act and react on one another producing the sense organs. And through these, assisted by the mind, we are able to know matter, the universe, the inferior Prakriti or the external nature of God. It is external as it consists of matter in all its shades of density. It is the universal object, both in matter and force, the universe manifest and unmanifest, the object of cognition, as distinguished from the superior Nature, which is the Spirit, the Knower, the conscious life Principle, the internal Nature, the basis of all, which supports this external nature, holding it together.

It is God's superior Nature, which enters into and sustains the entire universe holding it together. It is the very life, the Consciousness, the vital Soul, God's divine Being, the Spirit. Beyond these two natures we cannot imagine anything else. It is all-inclusive, subject and object, matter and spirit, the knower and the known. All this together is God, infinite in His power, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent and all-embracing. The inferior nature is eightfold but the superior nature is *One*. It is the absolute Consciousness, all-pervading, the Sentient, the Life-giver and the Soul of things.

We must understand this twofold char-

acter of God, Purusha and Prakriti, universal Soul and universal body, Spirit and matter. When these two natures conjoin, then evolution begins, creation and manifestation takes place. God, as it were, projects Himself and that projection we know as the universe. The material nature is called inferior because it is not conscious and it is the production of evil,

itself constituting the bondage of samsara, the wheel of birth and death, maya, the mysterious power of Ishvara. Such is the twofold nature of God's being. It is very mysterious, very difficult to grasp; but it is true for all that.

Having explained His twofold Prakriti or nature, Sri Krishna now reveals the mystery of life, the mystery of all existence.

6. Know that all beings are generated from these two (Prakritis). I am the origin and also the dissolution of the entire universe.

It is on account of My two Prakritis, My higher and lower natures, Spirit and matter, that manifestation takes place. These two together are the power by which I, Ishvara, produce the universe. And it is through this power also that I dissolve the universe. All beings are created from My two natures. In Me the whole universe originates and dissolves. Everything springs from My Prakriti. I am the alpha and omega of existence, its beginning and end. I, the Lord of these two powers, am the God of the universe.

As God is eternal and inseparable from His own nature, so creation, which is but the power of God, is also eternal. God and His creation are inseparable. They are co-existent, two phases of one Being. Creation, nature, Prakriti, is eternal, without beginning. God is always creating. He is never at rest. Should He withdraw for one moment, the whole universe would run into chaos and be destroyed. But there is the law of cycles, *pralaya*. And that is what is meant by the beginning and end of creation. The word used in Sanskrit is not creation but projection. Says Swami Vivekananda, 'The whole of this nature exists, it becomes finer, subsides; and then after a period of rest, as it were, the whole thing is again projected forward, and the same combination, the same evolution, the same manifestations appear

and remain playing, as it were, for a certain time, only again to break into pieces, to become finer and finer, until the whole thing subsides, and again comes out. Thus it goes on backwards and forwards with a wave-like motion throughout eternity.'³ That is what is meant by the beginning and end of creation—the beginning and end of our particular cycle.

In this wise, God is the origin and dissolution of the entire universe, always guiding and upholding this great scheme of creation. He is the efficient cause as well as the material cause of the universe. The *Mundaka Upanishad* says, 'As the spider creates and absorbs, as medicinal plants grow from the earth, as hairs grow from a living person, so this universe proceeds from the Immortal.'⁴ There is naught besides God. Whatever is, exists in Him. This is stated in the next verse.

(to be continued)

References

1. *Amritabindu Upanishad*, 19.
2. *Bhagavadgita*, 6.47.
3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 3.123.
4. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.1.7.

There is no refuge other than God, because He alone is true and eternal. Everything else is impermanent—it exists this moment and disappears the next. It is therefore meaningless to depend on impermanent objects; furthermore, this inevitably causes misery. But God's maya is so powerful that it does not allow us to understand this simple truth.

—Swami Turiyananda

The Charm of the Upanishads

C S RAMAKRISHNAN

Beauty charms. When we behold something beautiful we feel enraptured. But then, what is beauty? What is the secret of its charm? 'Beauty is Truth, Truth beauty,' joyously sings poet Keats. 'Beauty is the splendour of Truth,' observes Prof Chandrasekhar, who won the Nobel Prize measuring the stars. The poet speaks from an overflowing heart; the scientist writes from a razor-sharp intellect. The head and the heart, however, are one in declaring that it is Truth that inspires the charm. And since the Upanishads reveal the highest truth, no wonder, they are the source of infinite charm.

Universal Fascination

Superb is the fascination that the Upanishads hold for all earnest souls. World thinkers have showered unstinted praise on these time-honoured texts. Mahatma Gandhi says, 'Even if all the scriptures got reduced to ashes, if only the first verse of the *Isha Upanishad* were left intact in the memory of the Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever.' Schopenhauer, the German philosopher, was a relentless critic of all hypocrisy, but he used to call the Upanishad 'an incomparable book that stirs the spirit to the very depth of the soul. From every sentence deep, original and sublime thoughts arise; and in the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishad. It has been the solace of my life, and it will be the solace of my death.' He always kept a copy of the Upanishad on his table and would read a little from it every night before going to bed. Paul Deussen, another great scholar, speaks of the philosophy of the Upanishads as 'the strongest support of pure morality, the greatest consolation in the sufferings of life and death.' And the noted orien-

talist Max Muller says the Upanishads are to him 'like the light of the morning, like the pure air of the mountains—so simple, so true, once understood'.

What Does *Upanishad* Mean?

The Upanishads are popularly known as Vedanta. *Veda* means 'knowledge', *anta* means 'end'. Most of the Upanishads occur towards the end portion of the Vedas. But *anta* also means the last. The Upanishads form the last word, the most important formulation, about the Truth eternal. Appropriately have they been called 'the Himalayas of the soul'. As the Himalayas are the tallest mountain range in the world, the Upanishads are the loftiest expressions of the ultimate Reality.

The term *upanishad* also has a variety of implications. *Upa* means near, close by, *ni* means devotedly, *shad* means to sit. The disciple sits quite close to the teacher and listens to his exposition devotedly. There must be intimacy between the guru and the disciple, not only mentally, but also spiritually. What the Upanishads impart is not mere knowledge, but the highest wisdom. To appreciate their full charm the pupil and the teacher should be on the same wavelength. Commentators like Sri Shankara interpret the term in yet another way. *Upanishad* is what destroys ignorance, or what leads to Brahman—which, in fact, is the scope and the aim of these profound texts.

A Mine of Strength

There is, however, a popular misconception that views Vedanta with suspicion—as if Vedanta is something to be kept at a respectful distance, not to be approached too near. It is not for the young. Only old people who have retired from active life can toy with it. It ren-

ders you unfit for the work-a-day world. We can hear people remarking, 'Don't speak Vedanta to me', implying that the other person is suggesting something impractical. 'Oh, you are a Vedantin' means you are an eccentric, not quite normal, you are not worldly-wise—to put it bluntly, you are a fool.

This is laughably absurd. The truth is exactly opposite. The study and practice of Vedanta does not make you unfit; on the contrary, it makes you fitter. Far from making you weak, it brings you tremendous strength. Instead of making you nervous it gives you marvellous self-confidence. As a Vedantin you feel you can face any situation and come out triumphant. It is want of a correct understanding of the message of the Upanishads that makes you shy away from the rich treasures they offer. So let us take a bird's-eye view of these hoary texts and gain the bliss that is our birthright. To sip even a few drops of Upanishadic wisdom is to make ourselves *amritasya putrah*, the children of immortality. The alchemy of the Upanishads raises us from the animal level to the human level, and from the human level to the divine. The Vedantin leads a charmed life.

One All-pervading Verity

Traditionally the Upanishads are 108 in number, but for most purposes only ten of them are considered important, the ones commented upon by Sri Shankara. They are *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Prashna*, *Mundaka*, *Mandukya*, *Taittiriya*, *Aitareya*, *Chandogya* and *Brihadaranyaka*. *Kaushitaki*, *Maitrayani* and *Shvetashvatara* can also be added to this list. Even of these, the *Chandogya* and the *Brihadaranyaka* are the most important, being the longest, oldest and most comprehensive. But we need not bother about their number; there is no necessity to discuss them individually, as there is a remarkable ho-

mogeneity in their elucidation of the nature of Reality comprising the triad: God, the individual and the universe. No literary fences are required to separate them. Geography speaks of the seven oceans, but actually the oceans form only one single continuous mass of water. Likewise, all the Upanishads together constitute only one all-pervading verity.

Science and Vedanta

This is the age of science. Like a cornucopia, science has been showering on us all manner of facilities and luxuries that could not have been imagined even a couple of centuries back. So science rules the roost today. It has become highly respectable. Every proposition has to be tested against the touchstone, 'Is it scientific; is it in agreement with the laws of

Today, modern science also has realized the need to go beyond the reductionist Cartesian approach to reality. Giants of science like Schrodinger accept joyously the Upanishadic perception of the universe. In their common pursuit of truth, science and Vedanta travel by parallel paths, but at many points they meet and shake hands.

science?' But the material benefits it is able to offer us are not the prime purpose of science. What science seeks is truth. It wants to know the truth that governs each and every phenomenon we come across in the world.

The Upanishads also have the same aim. They too seek the Truth of truths, *satyasya satyam*.¹ So science and Vedanta have much in common, yet they differ in certain respects. Science employs observation and experiment, guided by strict reason. The law of gravitation, for instance, depends not on the authority of Newton, but on the fact that all falling bodies from an apple to a planet obey this law. Likewise, Vedanta also holds that its tenets are uni-

versal in their application. It is never against reason. Sri Shankara says that if a scripture declares that fire is cold Vedanta will not accept it. But it respects authority in another way. In Vedanta a truth is established in three ways: *śrutyā, yuktyā, svānubhūtyā*—through the authority of Veda, the application of relentless logic and one's own experience. The shruti is relied upon because it is not the opinion of any

The charm of the Upanishads lies both in the challenging philosophy of non-dualism they teach and also the poetic manner in which this teaching is given. Reality is non-dual, one without a second, and identical with the Self than which there is nothing higher.

person. It is *apaurusheya*, totally impersonal. No one wrote the shruti, and so it is free from the blemishes that creep in because of the limitations of the human mind. The shruti mantras were seen by rishis, who were mantra *drashtas* (seers). The unalloyed truths were reflected clearly in their pure hearts. So they are unquestionable. Yet, just because a proposition is accepted by the shruti and is in agreement with reason it cannot be declared to be true. It should be validated by one's own experience. The spiritual seeker must experience the truth in his own heart of hearts. This is a very important condition not demanded in a scientist.

All the conclusions of science are based on information supplied by the senses or their extensions. The telescope, for instance, is only an extension of the eye, enabling us to see farther than the eye can reveal. But there are many things that the senses cannot apprehend. The senses cannot measure beauty or love. On that account are we to deny the truth of beauty or love? As Sri Ramakrishna points out, just because you cannot see the stars in daytime does it follow that there are no stars during the day?² Reason too has its limits. It

cannot proceed beyond a *lakshmana rekha*. Intuition has to step in. Intuition does not deny reason; it only fulfils what reason is unable to deal with. We must remember this while perusing Upanishadic texts. The rishis were mystics. They could perceive truth directly through intuition. So some of their declarations will be found to transcend our conventional logic. Today, modern science also has realized the need to go beyond the reductionist Cartesian approach to reality. Giants of science like Schrodinger accept joyously the Upanishadic perception of the universe. In their common pursuit of truth, science and Vedanta travel by parallel paths, but at many points they meet and shake hands.

The Value of Discrimination

The *Katha Upanishad* points out that God has made the senses outward-oriented.³ So we seek happiness in things of the external world. Sensory pleasures, however, are transient; sooner or later they fail to satisfy. They become even counterproductive. When an anticipated pleasure is not attained, frustration sets in. Pleasure turns into pain. What appeared to be a merry-go-round at first glance is found to be really a misery-go-round. Trying to get happiness by pursuing sense-pleasures is like attempting to put out a fire by pouring ghee on it. So the *Upanishad* asks us to take a U-turn. Direct the buddhi inwards and discover the true source of all joy, the Atman. The *Upanishad* calls the aspirant who dives within to attain the immortal Self *dhira*, a word that has a double meaning—one who is bold, as also one who is intelligent. Self-realization is the highest wisdom and most thrilling adventure.

Expanding this concept further the *Upanishad* says we have two options: to go in for *preyas*, the pleasant, or unflaggingly seek *shreyas*, the good. The *dhira* recognizes the difference between the two choices. He opts for

the good, which ensures permanent happiness while the stupid man, thinking in terms of yoga and kshema, acquiring and hoarding, falls a slave to the glitter of the pleasant.⁴

Para Vidya and Apra Vidya

The supreme wisdom, then, is knowledge of the Self. But this knowledge is not to be confused with conventional knowledge. The *Mundaka Upanishad* distinguishes between *para vidya*, the higher knowledge and the *apara vidya*, the lower knowledge. The lower knowledge consists of all the empirical sciences and arts—which have a use in worldly life, but relate to things and enjoyments that perish. The higher knowledge, on the contrary, relates to *akshara*, the Imperishable.⁵

The *Chandogya Upanishad* tells the story of the sage Narada, who has an encyclopedic learning, but finds that he is sorrow-stricken. He approaches the eternal boy Sanatkumara for enlightenment. Sanatkumara asks him to mention what he already knows. Narada then reels off a stupendous list of the arts and sciences he has mastered—from the majestic Vedas to the cure of snakebite.⁶ Sanatkumara waives away that forest of learning as *apara*, and instructs Narada in the higher knowledge, the *para vidya*, the knowledge of the Self ‘knowing which everything becomes known’. *Para vidya* does not deny or contradict *apara vidya*, but includes and transcends it. In the *Katha Upanishad* the term *vidya* refers only to the higher knowledge, while the lower knowledge is called *avidya*, nescience or ignorance. It makes fun of proud scholars who consider themselves intelligent because of their proficiency in *avidya*: they are like the blind leading the blind, with both leaders and followers sinking into the mire.⁷

Guru and Disciple—Their Qualifications

‘Know the Self and be free’ is, therefore, the inspiring message from every one of the Upanishads. *Sā vidyā yā vimuktaye*, knowledge is that which liberates. To gain this knowledge the seeker must approach a guru; it cannot be derived from the Internet. Both the pupil and the teacher must have some essential qualifications. The pupil must have a keen intellect that discriminates between the real and the unreal. He must apply rigid analysis to distinguish the transitory from the abiding, the true from the false. Next he must practise *vairagya*, renunciation. The *Isha Upanishad* says, enjoy through giving up.⁸ A river remains a river only when its waters flow and are not stagnant. The aspirant must also acquire the six treasures of life: tranquillity, self-control, patience, poise, burning faith in matters of

The Mundaka Upanishad, which has supplied our national motto ‘Satyam eva jayate, truth alone triumphs’, has an enchanting illustration of the Brahman-Atman nexus.

Spirit and self-surrender. And inspiring all these must be the acute thirst for moksha, supreme freedom. How important shraddha, faith, is can be seen from the story of Nachiketas. When this teenager saw that his father was gifting away old, decrepit cows, the Upanishad says, shraddha entered into him.⁹ And that shraddha catapulted him to the abode of Yama, from whom he sought and got a definite answer to the time-old question: what happens after death?

The guru, likewise, must be competent. Not only should he be thoroughly grounded in the shastras, but he should be able to explain all the nuances of philosophy in a lucid, engaging manner. *Ācarati iti ācāryaḥ*, the acharya is one who not only professes but also practises what he professes. He must be a role model for the student to follow. He should be

completely selfless, guiding the students not for money but out of pure love for those who are earnest aspirants. The guru must be a *brahma-nishtha*, totally established in the non-dual Supreme.

The guru tests the student before accepting him. Yama offers all manner of temptations to Nachiketas, who rejects them all summarily with the remark, 'Keep to yourself the "kamini and kanchana" you are offering me, and impart to me the Truth eternal.' (1.1.26-7) Yama is mightily pleased and says, 'May I get disciples like you.' (1.2.9) Similarly the guru asks Satyakama about his lineage. Who is his father? Satyakama asks his mother. The

not, nor speech nor mind; It is other than the known and above the unknown.¹² The *Taittiriya Upanishad* points out that our words and thoughts are adequate only for the realm of plurality; they fail with reference to the non-dual Spirit.¹³ We have to make use of them as indicators or signposts and not as vehicles taking us to the very end. The Self is to be comprehended 'as It is'.

Atman = Brahman

What is more, Atman and Brahman mean the same Reality. What is without is identical with what is within. The inquiry into the source of the universe and the quest after the true Self reveal that it is the one non-dual Reality that appears as the manifold world and as the plurality of individual souls. The unique method of the Upanishads is a synthesis of the objective and subjective ways of approach to Reality. Brahman is infinite, so Atman too must be infinite, as there cannot be two infinities.

The *Mundaka Upanishad*, which has supplied our national motto '*Satyam eva jayate*, truth alone triumphs',¹⁴ has an enchanting illustration of the Brahman-Atman nexus. It presents two birds of golden plumage sitting on the branches of the same tree. The bird on the lower branch tastes the fruits, some sweet, some bitter. It gazes at the other bird sitting on the higher branch without eating any fruit. Tasting and refraining, tasting again and refraining, the lower bird goes up in a number of quantum leaps. It comes to admire the desirelessness of the higher bird and finally merges with it. The lower bird in the allegory is the individual soul, while the higher bird is the non-dual Reality, Brahman or Paramatman. When desires vanish, the jivatman realizes its identity with the Paramatman.¹⁵

In the *Taittiriya Upanishad* Bhrigu approaches his father Varuna, who gives him a formula that indicates the nature of Reality.

Modern Science boasts that all its laws are experimentally verifiable. In the Upanishads also we find strict experimentation performed to identify Reality.

mother says she is not sure. As she is Jabala, the boy may tell the guru that he is Satyakama Jabala. When the guru hears from the boy this identification he declares that only one born in a noble family can be so honest. Satyakama is accepted and becomes a great sage.¹⁰

Unique Portrayal of the Self

The charm of the Upanishads lies both in the challenging philosophy of non-dualism they teach and also the poetic manner in which this teaching is given. Reality is non-dual, one without a second, and identical with the Self than which there is nothing higher. The plurality of things is denied. The great sage Yajnavalkya observes in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*: 'Where there is duality, there one sees another, one smells another, one hears another, one thinks of another, one understands another. Where, however, everything has become just one's own Self, there whereby and whom would one smell, see, hear, speak to, think of, or understand?'¹¹ The *Kena Upanishad* says, 'To the Self the eye goes

'That from which beings are born, by which when born they live and to which on departing they enter—that is Brahman.'¹⁶ Probing into this formula Bhrigu first thinks of food, *anna*, as the 'must' for existence. But soon he feels food alone is not sufficient, his imagination turns to *prana*, vital breath. Next he opts for *manas*, the mind, as the prime mover. Further analysis shows that intellectual awareness, *viññana*, is the reality. Finally he concludes that *ananda*, bliss, is Brahman, the Absolute, wherein there is no distinction of the enjoyer and the object enjoyed.¹⁷ The Infinite is divisionless, but manifests itself through the *pancha koshas*, the five sheaths.

In the *Chandogya Upanishad* Indra, the king of the gods, and Virochana, the king of the asuras, request Prajapati, the Creator, to instruct them about the Self. After prolonged *tapas* Virochana concludes that the Self is one's own body. But Indra is not satisfied with this conclusion. After further *tapas* he realizes that beyond the waking, dreaming and sleeping states is the *Turiya* state of pure Consciousness, Bliss.¹⁸ A more comprehensive and rigid analysis of the three states we get in the *Mandukya Upanishad*, which presents Aum as the symbol of the ultimate Reality, which transcends everything.

Experimental Verification of Truth

Modern Science boasts that all its laws are experimentally verifiable. In the Upanishads also we find strict experimentation performed to identify Reality. In the *Chandogya Upanishad* Uddalaka asks his son Shvetaketu to bring a fruit of a *nyagrodha* tree. The fruit is broken, when some extremely small seeds are seen. The father asks the son to break one of the seeds. The son exclaims that nothing is seen now. Then the father explains that the subtle essence he does not see is the essence of the *nyagrodha* tree. It is in subtle essence that all things have their existence. 'That is the Truth. That is the Self. And Shvetaketu, *tat tvam asi*, That thou art.' (6.12.1-3) In another experi-

ment a teaspoonful of salt is put into a glass of water. 'What do you see?' asks the father. 'Nothing,' says the son. 'Now sip the water,' says the father. 'It is salty, sir,' says the son. 'In the same way,' continues Uddalaka, 'though you do not see Brahman in this body, he is indeed here. That which is subtle is the essence. It is the Truth; that is the Self. That thou art.' (6.13.1-3)

'*Tat tvam asi*' is a *mahavakya*. There are three other *mahavakyas*: '*Prajnanam brahma*, Consciousness is Brahman';¹⁹ '*Aham brahmasmi*, I am Brahman';²⁰ and '*Ayam atma brahma*, This Atman is Brahman.'²¹ They are profound insights into the Reality supreme. Understood aright the Upanishads invite us to lead a full life. They bring us *abhyudaya* (material prosperity) and *nihsreyasa* (spiritual fulfilment). The more we study the Upanishads, the brighter and more satisfying shines our life. Let us surrender ourselves to the charm of the Upanishads.



References

1. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.1.20.
2. *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1975), 27.
3. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.1.
4. *ibid.*, 1.2.2.
5. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.1.4,5.
6. *Chandogya Upanishad*, 7.1.1-3.
7. *Katha*, 1.2.5.
8. *Isha Upanishad*, 1.
9. *Katha*, 1.1.2.
10. *Chandogya*, 4.4.1-5.
11. *Brihadaranyaka*, 4.5.15.
12. *Kena Upanishad*, 1.3-4.
13. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.4.1.
14. *Mundaka*, 3.1.6.
15. *ibid.*, 3.1.1-2.
16. *Taittiriya*, 3.1.1.
17. *ibid.*, 3.2-6.
18. *Chandogya*, 8.7-12.
19. *Aitareya Upanishad*, 3.1.3.
20. *Brihadaranyaka*, 1.4.10.
21. *Mandukya Upanishad*, 2.

The Ramakrishna Maxim for Achievement

DR B T ADVANI

Man's evolution over the ages has been the outcome of his inborn compulsion and struggle for achievement. His material craving has constantly brought about improvement in living conditions—eating, clothing, housing, amusement—in short, in civilization. Since desires are unlimited and their satisfaction is limited and temporary, the struggle for achievement persists, becoming more and more vigorous, leading to discoveries and inventions of novel modes of satisfaction of desires, providing a constant and continuous impetus to the growth of science and technology.

The later half of the twentieth century witnessed a flood of innovations, making one day's achievement obsolete the next day. The glorious record of man's achievements over thousands of years only calls for more achievements, and as a sequel, the new millennium has to be a millennium of achievement. This urge resulting in general and cumulative achievements arises from man's natural and spontaneous response to circumstances. But it is a great problem for many to keep pace with the strong current of development becoming stronger each day, nay, each moment.

Thus, the science and technology of achievement has become the need of the hour for individuals at all levels. Publications on achievement and success are on the increase. They give tips and hints for success in practical life, in business, in professions and various vocations. There are also books to teach you how to be a successful wife, husband, parent or friend. They tell you success stories of eminent figures who rose from humble beginnings in their respective vocations and appointments by dint of determination, confidence, hard work, amiableness and, above all,

a dauntless spirit to overcome difficulties. The books inspire us with proverbs and remind us that they are time-validated prescriptions for success: 'Where there is a will there is a way', 'No gain without pain', 'God helps those who help themselves', 'Better late than never', 'Honesty is the best policy', 'Time and tide wait for none', 'Opportunity knocks but once; seize it.'

Surrender to God

This author, however, finds the maxim of maxims for success in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, a spiritual classic. Said Sri Ramakrishna to a householder at Jayagopal Sen's house on 28 November 1883: '*Surrender yourself to God and you will achieve everything.*'¹ Again, on 27 December 1883, he told another devotee, Shrish, 'Surrender everything at the feet of God, what else can you do? Give Him the power of attorney. Let Him do whatever He thinks best. If you rely on a great man, he will never injure you.' (369) To Master Mahashay (M), the blessed compiler of the *Gospel*, he said on 2 January 1884: 'Everything can be realized simply through love of God. If one is able to love God, one does not lack anything.' (376)

The *Gospel* is replete with such assurances and exhortations, for this was Sri Ramakrishna's constant theme: Realize God; surrender to God; love God—this should be the aim of life; first God and then world. He repeated this to all devotees, most of whom were householders. Compassionate incarnation of the Almighty that he was, he advised householders that they need not give up the world and their duties to their family and society, but should practise devotion to God and realize Him, as a foundation for a happy life in the world. (1022, to Keshab; 255, to Navadvip

Goswami. He repeated this to several householders.)

Need for Purity of Mind

His parables lucidly bring forth this technique of success in life in the world: If we swim in the sea, there is a danger of being eaten up by crocodiles; but if we smear ourselves with turmeric they won't harm us. Similarly, when we live and work in the world without God, the six enemies—lust (*kama*), anger (*krodha*), greed (*lobha*), delusion (*moha*), pride (*mada*) and jealousy (*matsarya*)—would wean us away from happiness, making us miserable in spite of all comforts and wealth, an unpleasant truth we witness everywhere, every moment. But when we 'smear' ourselves with devotion to God, worldly troubles and afflictions will cease to affect us, and the same world will be transformed into a 'mansion of mirth'. Any psychologist would confirm that our efficiency, success and achievement in any field of work get adversely affected if our mind is contaminated by lust, anger and the like. Our concentration improves and we become more efficient if are able to free our mind of such undesirable forces, called in the *Gita* demoniac qualities (*asuri sampad*). Such liberation, or *mukti*, or equilibrium of mind, or 'sthitaprajna', amounts to manifestation of the divinity already in us, as taught by Swami Vivekananda. There are four major yogas, or methods, for realization of the divine in us; by knowledge, work, concentration or love, by one or more or all of these in varying combinations and permutations.²

Bhakti for the Modern Age

However, Sri Ramakrishna emphasizes bhakti yoga, or the method of love or devotion to the Personal God, as the best path for the kali yuga. But he repeatedly exhorted his devotees to somehow realize God first and then live in the world. That will prevent us from being burnt away by the threefold misery of the world (*adhyatmika*, arising from one's own

body and mind; *adhibhautika*, arising from other beings; *adhidaivika*, arising from natural calamities like flood, famine and cyclone).

The Ramakrishna maxim for achievement—love of God—is not an empty exhortation to devotees. On 5 January 1884, while in samadhi, Sri Ramakrishna prayed to Mother Kali: 'Mother, may those who come to You have all their desires fulfilled!'³ And on the eve of the auspicious Ratha Yatra (Car Festival) on 13 July 1885, he enunciated his maxim for achievement in explicit terms: 'If a man gathers his whole mind and fixes it on me (God, one's Chosen Deity) then, indeed, he achieves everything.' (798)

No Substitute for Hard Work

A rational mind does not accept miracles. Nor did Sri Ramakrishna cherish any respect for them. He denounced them as impediments to spiritual progress. His life and teachings make it abundantly clear that indolence or laziness cannot pass for surrender to God. He never advocated just praying and idling away the time, waiting for God to do our job. Here are his own words: 'Do your duties in the world as if you were the doer, but knowing all the time that God alone is the Doer and you are the instrument.' (804)

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, whose life is a portrait of Sri Ramakrishna in action, is a model of constant work, self-help and diligence. Hers was a pure mind ever united in prayer to God, Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Vivekananda, on whom Sri Ramakrishna enjoined the mission to teach mankind, was a protagonist of work—hard, systematic, selfless work—not merely for God-realization, but, before that and more urgently, for food, clothing, shelter and education of the masses.

Understood thus, the Ramakrishna maxim means diligent, planned effort. To enable us to get the maximum with the minimum of effort, he postulated the need for gathering our dispersed mind and concentrating it on God. A thread with a frayed end can-

not pass through the eye of a needle, but when it is made one-pointed with the help of a little water, it does. Similarly, a flickering, scattered mind does not lead to achievement in any walk of life. Quality and efficiency in even a simple, manual work calls for concentration.

According to Sri Ramakrishna, or—in the words of Romain Rolland—according to the spiritual experience of three hundred million people for two thousand years, this concentration of the mind can be easily practised and attained if we fix our mind on our Chosen Deity with the help of worship, japa (repetition of the guru-given mantra), meditation, holy company, devotional readings, service to holy people and other living beings as service to God. Swami Brahmananda, Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual son, explains this phenomenon. When someone wondered how one could do one's work if one is immersed in God, he thus explained the secret of work: 'Give the whole of your mind to God. If there is no wastage of mental energy, with a fraction of your mind you can do so much work that the world will be dazed.'⁴ His spiritual capacity and administrative abilities as the first President of the Ramakrishna Order bear glowing testimony to this profound truth.

Concentration on the Divine

Concentration can be practised by fixing the mind on any object constantly; but that would not mean much. But if the mind is fixed on God, which is our own divine nature, pure Self, it will imbibe divine qualities, which will make it pure. Concentration arising from purity of heart will be stable and spiritually more fruitful. Impure thoughts scatter the mind; pure thoughts springing from meditation on the Divine gather the dispersed mind easily.

Sri Ramakrishna explains this fact with a fine observation. When we go to the east, the west is automatically left behind. Similarly, when the mind is directed towards God, it is automatically weaned away from worthless diversions. Thus, 'gathering' and 'fixing' be-

come two aspects of the same phenomenon of energizing the mind. With the mind so organized, assures Sri Ramakrishna, we can achieve everything. Regardless of the circumstances, anyone can become an achiever par excellence and realize all the four values of life: righteousness (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*), fulfilment of legitimate desires (*kama*) and liberation (*moksha*).

Today our tragedy is this: the clever among us, although endowed with sharp minds, run recklessly after wealth and pleasures, showing scant regard for even the basics of moral life. Their whole life becomes a mad, aimless race, invariably resulting in tension, frustration and misery—amidst all their affluence, fame and power! It is a frustrating and meaningless life often ending in untimely death. This is nothing but a huge waste of human energy. The Ramakrishna formula, the eternal, spiritual formula, is the easiest and surest technique for any achievement worth the name, bringing material satisfaction along with spiritual bliss.

From Illiteracy to Being an Object of Adoration

Sri Ramakrishna's own life exemplifies this fact. An illiterate priest, born in a poor brahmin family in an unknown hamlet, becomes within his lifespan of fifty years an object of worship and adoration all over the world, attracting world-famous orators like Keshab Chandra Sen⁵ and other Brahmo scholars, brilliant graduates like Narendranath Dutta and several other talented young men. In fact, his unique personality drew to him many notable personalities like Mahendra Nath Gupta, the well-known teacher and recorder of the *Gospel*, Trailokyanath Sanyal, the singer, Girish Chandra Ghosh, the dramatist, Dr Mahendralal Sarkar, the doctor with a scientific bent of mind; Hiranand Advani from remote Sindh, who later matured into a renowned saint in his province; and scholars like Pandit Padmalochan Tarkalankar, Vijay-

krishna Goswami and Mahimacharan. Wealthy devotees like Rani Rasmani, Mathuranath Biswas and Balram Bose deemed it a privilege to be able to provide material help to their beloved Thakur and his growing family of devotees. His *rasaddars* (suppliers of needs) always felt blessed to be of service to their master Sri Ramakrishna. Foreign scholars like Max Muller and Romain Rolland wrote his biographies. And today, in his name hundreds of centres of the Ramakrishna Order have temples and monasteries, run hospitals and schools, and undertake relief work all over the world. Thousands of other private centres and individual efforts derive inspiration from his teachings, underlining and proclaiming the efficacy of the Ramakrishna maxim for achievement for material as well as spiritual attainments: 'Surrender yourself to God and you will achieve everything.' May he inspire us to adopt his maxim, is my humble prayer to Sri Ramakrishna.

Proximity to the Divine—Some Exemplars

We may recall that the greatest and immortal achievers have all been men of God who adorn the pages of history and monumental shrines for hundreds and thousands of years: Buddha, Mahavira, Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed, Zoroaster, Guru Nanak, and hundreds of saints like Kabir, Surdas, Mira, Jnaneshwar, Tukaram and Raidas. Even among kings and statesmen, scientists and businessmen, emerges the principle, 'the nearer to the Divine, the greater and the more lasting the achievement'. Ashoka became Ashoka the Great when he surrendered to Buddha, the Enlightened One. Akbar is respected for his Din-i Ilahi. Washington and Lincoln are remembered for their humanism springing from divinity. Marx and Engels denounced religion in their scheme of things, but even that was out of feeling for the suffering masses, who were victims of exploitation. They played an important role in modern history because sensitivity to other people's suf-

fering bespeaks proximity to the Divine.

Said Swami Vivekananda, 'Him I call a Mahātman (great soul) whose heart bleeds for the poor, otherwise he is a Durātman (wicked soul).'⁶ Mahatma Gandhi, Lokamanya Tilak, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and other leaders of the Indian freedom movement cherished spiritual ideals and owed their inspiration to the *Bhagavadgita*, the *Ramayana* and Swami Vivekananda's works. Recently one of our Chief Election Commissioners, who had risked a lot to enforce disciplinary measures, acknowledged the spiritual basis of life as enshrined in the *Gita* to be the source of his fearlessness, selflessness and enthusiasm. Surely this is not an isolated example, but one among many. Most recently Seung Gong, abbot of a South Korean Buddhist temple, said he had a key to winning the soccer World Cup: 'Players must abandon their greed for goals. Greed makes your feet stiff. You just kick the ball at the goalmouth as hard as possible, not thinking about scoring. You get it.'⁷ He was only reaffirming what Sri Krishna had taught thousands of years ago in the *Gita*: 'You only have the right to work, not to its fruit. Be not attached to the fruit (result) of action or to inaction (laziness and indolence).'⁸

The Lord we worship is sure to reward us for our work. Says Sri Krishna: 'Those who worship Me without any other thought, those who are ever united with Me, I provide them with what they need and preserve what they already have. (9.22)

Needed: Both Vision and Action

Sanjaya, who reported to King Dhritarashtra the events of the *Mahabharata* war, sums up the *Gita* as a science of achievement. He thus concludes the Song Celestial: 'Wherever there is Krishna, the Lord of yoga, and Partha, the wielder of the bow, there will certainly be prosperity, victory, welfare and constant justice; that is my conviction.' (18.78) Swami Ranganathanandaji interprets this conclusion of the *Gita* thus: 'The energies of Krishna and

of Arjuna must combine together in a society. ... Sri Krishna, the man of vision [and] ... foresight, combined with the tremendous energy of implementation in Arjuna, the man of action, the hero of action, ensures in any nation these blessings: *śrīḥ, vijayaḥ, bhūutiḥ* and *dhruvā nītiḥ*.⁹

‘That is the new message of the *Gita* and of Swami Vivekananda coming to all of us. So, here is that wonderful combination of two energy resources, vision and action, thinking and implementation. They must go together. Meditation and work, they must go together.’ (3.388) The learned swami calls this ‘the science of human possibilities’. (3.388)

* * *

Thus, Sri Ramakrishna’s call for surrender to God implies our commitment to the Divine that is latent in us and personified in the lives of incarnations and saints, and our urge for diligent effort. This ancient and universal philosophy and science of achievement ensures attainment of wealth, virtue, earthly fulfilment (not mere satiety) and, finally, heavenly bliss at all times in all fields of activity to everyone everywhere. The best human achieves the best, which is the Divine. The Ramakrishna phenomenon revitalizes this

eternal truth.

*

References

1. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), 326.
2. See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.257.
3. *Gospel*, 381.
4. Swami Gambhirananda, *Apostles of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1995), 96.
5. (i) ‘We are charmed by the depth, penetration and simplicity of his spirit. The never-ceasing metaphors and analogies in which he indulges are ... as apt as they are beautiful.’ —Keshab Chandra Sen, *The Indian Mirror* (28 March 1875); (ii) ‘Hinduism must have in it a deep source of beauty, truth and goodness to inspire such men as these.’ —*The Sunday Mirror* (28 March 1875).
6. CW, 5.58.
7. ‘Young Monk’s Spiritual Key to Winning the Trophy’, *The Indian Express*, (Nagpur, 25 May 2002), 15.
8. *Gita*, 2.48.
9. Swami Ranganathananda, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita*, 3 vols. (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2001), 3.387.

Teach Them Young

A mother could not get her son to come home before sunset. So, she told him that the road to their house was haunted by ghosts, who came out after dusk.

By the time the boy grew up he was so afraid of ghosts that he refused to run errands at night. So she gave him a medal and taught him that it would protect him.

Bad religion gives him faith in the medal.

Good religion gets him to see that ghosts do not exist.

—Anthony de Mello, *The Song of the Bird*, 71

Kaṭha Rudra Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

The duties of a *sannyāsin* (continued)

कुण्डिकां चमसं शिष्यं त्रिविष्टपमुपानहौ ।
शीतोपघातिनीं कन्यां कौपीनाच्छादनं तथा ॥५॥
पवित्रं स्नानशार्दिं च उत्तरासङ्गमेव च ।
यज्ञोपवीतं वेदांश्च सर्वं तद्वर्जयेद्यतिः ॥६॥
स्नानं पानं तथा शौचमद्भिः पूताभिराचरेत् ।
नदीपुलिनशायी स्याद्देवागारेषु वा स्वपेत् ॥७॥
नात्यर्थं सुखदुःखाभ्यां शरीरमुपतापयेत् ।
स्तूयमानो न तुष्येत निन्दितो न शपेत्परान् ॥८॥

5 - 8. An ascetic [monk] shall abandon all these [the following articles]: water pot, [alms] bowl, sling-bag¹ [to carry his alms, if any], staff, footwear, rags² for protection from cold, loin-cloth, garment [to cover the body], purifying ring,³ bath towel, upper cloth, sacred thread and the holy scriptures.⁴ He shall bathe and cleanse himself with purified water, which he shall also use for drinking. He shall sleep on the sands of a river[bank] or in temples. He shall not subject the body to [needless] affliction by excessive pleasure and pain.⁵ He shall not rejoice when praised nor shall he curse when reviled by others.

The characteristic of continence (celibacy, or *brahmacarya*)

ब्रह्मचर्यलक्षणम्
ब्रह्मचर्येण संतिष्ठेदप्रमादेन मस्करी ।
दर्शनं स्पर्शनं केलिः कीर्तनं गुह्यभाषणम् ॥९॥
संकल्पोऽध्यवसायश्च क्रियानिवृत्तिरेव च ।
एतन्मैथुनमष्टाङ्गं प्रवदन्ति मनीषिणः ॥१०॥
विपरीतं ब्रह्मचर्यमनुष्ठेयं मुमुक्षुभिः ।

9 - 11. The one who bears the staff [the ascetic or the *sannyāsin*] shall be firmly established in uncompromising celibacy [*brahmacarya*]. These [the following] are what the wise call the eight-fold intercourse [with a woman]: seeing, touching, sporting, discoursing about, entering into secret dialogue, [mental] resolve, enterprise [perseverance in pleasure-seeking] and physical enjoyment. *Brahmacarya* is contrary to all these and must be observed by [all] seekers of liberation.

The fruits of celibacy

ब्रह्मचर्यस्य फलम्
यज्ञगद्गासकं भानं नित्यं भाति स्वतः स्फुरत् ॥११॥
स एष जगतः साक्षी सर्वात्मा विमलाकृतिः ।
प्रतिष्ठा सर्वभूतानां प्रज्ञानघनलक्षणः ॥१२॥

11, 12. That⁶ [spontaneous] flash of illumination that irradiates the world is ever shining. It is indeed the witness of the world, the universal Self, embodiment of purity, substratum of all beings, of the very nature of [absolute] Consciousness through and through.

Attainment of Brahman-realization possible [only] through knowledge

ब्रह्मभावापत्तेः ज्ञानायत्तता

न कर्मणा न प्रजया न चान्येनापि केनचित् ।

ब्रह्मवेदनमात्रेण ब्रह्माप्नोत्येव मानवः ॥३३॥

13. Neither by work nor through progeny nor by any other [means whatsoever], but only by intuitive awareness of Brahman does a person attain Brahman.

(to be continued)

Notes

1. *Sannyāsins* often carry a sling-bag made of cloth, mainly to collect and carry alms.
2. The original word in Sanskrit in *kanthā*, which is a cloth composed of tattered pieces of cloth patched together into one piece. It is a symbol of extreme austerity and abhorrence of expensive garments.
3. A spiritual aspirant usually wears a ring made of sacred *kuśa* grass as a symbol of purity particularly during religious observances.
4. The original word for holy scriptures in Sanskrit is *veda*. The import is that a *sannyāsīn* of the highest order goes beyond scriptural injunctions as well as the knowledge gained from the scriptures through the mind and the intellect. Such is the daring of the Upaniṣadic literature that they declare that the Vedas too ought to be ultimately abandoned by a seeker of absolute Truth. As Swami Vivekananda pointed out, the Vedas are the only scriptures in the world that are bold enough to state that the study of the Vedas is not ultimately necessary. 'He (a *sannyāsīn*) stands on the head of the Vedas,' say the Vedas themselves.
5. A *sannyāsīn* should avoid the extremes of bodily comfort on the one hand and hardship on the other. (See *Bhagavadgītā*, 6.16-7).
6. Described here is the nature of the Atman realized as a result of the pure knowledge arising out of [the power of] *brahmacarya* (celibacy or continence). —Upaniṣad Brahmayogin's commentary.

Is the World Real?

Once I heard a person arguing in front of our Master, saying that this world is real. After listening to him, the Master said to him, 'Ram, why don't you say in simple words that even now you have the desire to enjoy the sour dish of hog-plum (the worthless pleasures of the world)? What is the need for all this vain argumentation?' What response could have been more forceful and irrefutable? The truth is that if one has attachments one is afraid to renounce the world. But to hide this attitude and imagine that one can realize God without giving up attachments, only indicates one's natural inner weakness.

—Swami Turiyananda

❧ Glimpses of Holy Lives ❧

Infectious Purity

Nirū was a poor Muslim weaver in Varanasi. Though married for long, he was not blessed with a child. Pleased with Nirū's hospitality, a fakir once predicted that Nirū would have a son. The fakir's prediction was haunting Nirū when that evening he was washing his yarn in the nearby river. Suddenly the tide rose and washed away the yarn. Nirū followed it for long but could not retrieve it. Around sundown, the yarn was washed ashore and a tired Nirū picked it up. Along with the yarn his hand felt something softer than butter. It was a newborn baby. Nirū was thrilled and brought it home. After some initial hesitation, his wife Nima too took fascination for the child. A mullah named the child Kabir and predicted that many devotional songs would stream forth from the child.

Kabir, the divine child, grew up untouched by worldliness. When he came of age, his father taught him weaving. While his hands wove, Kabir's mind was busy with divine thoughts and his lips, singing divine songs. He had no consciousness of the external world, much less his body. Once when his mother gave him some silk thread, he wove a shawl out of it and presented it to a Hindu devotee. Nor would he let money accumulate. Whatever he had, he gave away to holy men. His parents were concerned about his other-worldliness and decided to follow the time-honoured remedy: marriage.

Considering it to be a part of his karma, Kabir married Jijja but did not have physical relations with her, since he had no bodily cravings. Kabir's parents, crestfallen at their failure, spent some more miserable days in the world and breathed their last.

Jijja now had to face Kabir's eccentricities

alone. But she was a devoted wife and looked upon service to her husband as a great blessing. She did not wear even the conventional burka to cover her face, since Kabir considered that too a luxury and gave it away to the needy.

Jijja had to find some job to make ends meet. Saukar, a rich grocer, leered at her. He taunted her for living with a lunatic and promised her riches if she yielded to his wishes. Jijja returned home in tears and narrated everything to Kabir. He too was concerned, but said, 'I am sure nothing can sully your purity, but only pity Saukar; I don't know what ill will befall him for coveting another's wife.' But Jijja said, 'I am scared; he has set his mind on me.' Kabir replied, 'All these problems have arisen only because I haven't yet been formally initiated into spiritual life. I shall seek Guru Ramananda and request him to initiate me with the Rama mantra. That will surely effect some change in our lives.' 'Pardon me if I am wrong,' said Jijja. 'We are Muslims, but you keep harping on Rama. Is that right?' Kabir said, 'Ram and Rahim are one. So are Krishna and Karim. My mind is somehow attracted to Rama. All these days I was not so much for the externals of religion, like guru and rituals. But now I understand that the same eternal Reality that in inside us is also manifest outside as the external guru. The same Reality again dwells in the Rama mantra.' But ... but,' wondered Jijja. 'Will Ramananda accept you, a Muslim, as his disciple? Even if he does, will his disciples agree to your becoming one of them?' Kabir thought for a while, and with a song on his lips left home at midnight. Jijja was puzzled.

Swami Ramananda left his ashrama early morning for meditation on the banks of

the Ganga. As he left the ashrama, he recoiled on having stepped on something. Knowing that it was a human being, he exclaimed, 'Rama, Rama!' Kabir got up, happy at having got the mantra from his guru. He repeated the mantra before his guru, who assured him that the Rama mantra was the remedy of all ills, all sins. Kabir returned home, his being full of Rama.

From then on Kabir wore a tulsi garland and did *nama-sankirtan* (group singing) in the city thoroughfares. Many Hindus joined him in his songs. Hindu-Muslim unity in God was thus effortlessly brought about. Many devotees flocked to Kabir, who preached love of God and discouraged dry reasoning.

A hundred of them visited him one day and said they would not only have bhajan at his place but also bhojan, meals. Kabir was in a fix: he did not have the means to feed so many. It was the pure and devoted Jijja who suggested the frightening solution: she would yield to Saukar's desires and ask him for food-stuffs and money in return. She would then end her life, looking upon it not as death but a door to immortality. Kabir was speechless and shuddered at the thought. Jijja said, 'What is there to think about? Let's go.'

They reached Saukar's house. Though happy seeing Jijja, Saukar frowned at Kabir. It was Jijja who spoke: 'Believe me, he has come to offer me to you, I swear on Rama. If you believe my words, you should do something in return. We have to feed a hundred devotees at home. If you can defray the expenses, I shall go back home, serve them a last time and get back to you positively.' Saukar trusted her and gave her profuse gifts in cash and kind. Kabir and Jijja returned home and arranged special kirtan and feast for the devotees. Deeply contented, the devotees left at night.

Now it started raining. 'Shall I go alone to Saukar or are you coming with me?' asked Jijja. 'It's raining so heavily ...' Kabir's voice sank. 'How does that matter? Oh, you appear to hesitate; no use depending on you. Let me

go alone,' started Jijja. 'Jijja! Jijja!' Kabir followed her. 'Don't get drenched. You will catch cold. Moreover you will dirty yourself in the mud. Saukar give me good coins, not counterfeits. I too should hand you over to him in good condition. Here, wrap yourself with this blanket. I shall carry you on my shoulders.' Jijja obeyed him, taking care not to touch his person with her feet. On the way, she burst out laughing. 'What's the matter, Jijja?' asked Kabir. She said, 'It's you who sing "Coveting others wives amounts to driving a golden sword in one's throat." So you thought it better to earn the merit of feeding so many devotees even at the cost of Saukar accruing such a heinous sin?' 'Never,' sobbed Kabir, struggling for words. 'Whatever merits I have acquired today by feeding the devotees, I offer them all to Saukar. Not only that: Saukar's two more sins—of touching you and causing your death—may they accrue to me, not to him. This is my prayer to Rama.' Jijja intervened, 'Wait, wait, don't appropriate all the merits to yourself; as your *sahadharmini* (partner in dharma) I too have a share in them.'

They entered Saukar's house and stood outside his room. Seeing them act true to their words, Saukar was in tears. The impurity of his mind was washed away at once. Kabir handed him a sweetmeat and said, 'Saukar, with your generous help we could feed the devotees sumptuously. Here is some prasada. Please accept it first.' Saukar fell at Kabir's feet like a rod and wept profusely. Kabir asked him to get up. Saukar said, 'If I do, I have to behold again your holy face and that of my mother. It's not proper for a saint like you to visit my house. I shall get up only after both of you leave the place.' Kabir consoled him and left with Jijja. Jijja wondered what changed Saukar's mind. Kabir replied, 'Haven't you heard me sing, "The disciple is the cloth, the guru the washerman, and God the soap."? God cleansed Saukar's heart today and filled it with wisdom.' But perhaps it was Kabir's own purity that infected Saukar. *



Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

The Vedanta Society of New York: A Brief Survey. *Swami Tathagatananda.* The Vedanta Society of New York, 34 West 71st Street, New York 10023. Copies available from Advaita Ashrama, 5 Deh Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014. 343 pp. 2000. Rs 125.

In his study of the Ramakrishna Movement in the United States (*Vedanta for the West*, Indiana University press, 1994) Carl T Jackson points out that 'as a pioneer in paving the way for introduction of Asian religious conceptions in the West, the Ramakrishna Movement may be said to stand on the edge of one of the mega trends of modern world history.'

This fascinating survey by Swami Tathagatanandaji of the New York Vedanta Society founded by Swami Vivekananda himself, shows, in brief, how this stature of being a 'mega trend' has been achieved. This meticulously researched study of the Society—of which the author himself has been the spiritual leader from 1978—throws new light on its triumphs (and trials). Indeed, this is the first Vedanta Society in the West associated not only with the direct disciples—Swamiji himself, Abhedananda and Saradananda—but also with distinguished successors like Bodhananda and Pavitrananda.

The book is in two parts: Part I is a study of Swami Vivekananda's work and the foundation of the Society and Part II shows how the Society 'Flourishes under the Leadership of the Swamis' and is updated to 2000. Appended to the book are two essays by the author, information about the members and the nature of the Society's activities. A selected Bibliography and Index are also provided.

'Since its inception,' says the revered author, 'the Vedanta Society has been unceasingly preaching the sublime universal and dynamic philosophy of Vedanta for the enlightenment of humanity.' He traces how this ideal shaped the pragmatic, practi-

cal bases of the Society. It is fascinating to contemplate Swamiji's encounter with America: 'From the vast serenity of India he was now plunged into the excited mood of the Fair and the exuberance of the American way of life.' Equally pertinent is the revered author's point about the receptivity of Americans in 'experiencing the truth of religion, a new moral philosophy based upon the concept of Brahman, which manifests, permeates, interpenetrates and controls the entire Creation—visible and invisible—and again transcends everything!'

Tathagatanandaji's book also provides in an integrated way significant details about the impact the direct disciples of the Great Master associated with this Vedanta Society had on the philosophers, psychologists and Sanskritists of the time. It is interesting to read Abhedanandaji's diary entry telling how he 'raised Professor James's objection to Monism and showed by logical reasoning how irrational and false those arguments were'. And later when at Professor James's place Abhedanandaji 'gave further reasonings ... Prof James was compelled to say that [his] arguments ... were indeed irrefutable'.

At this meeting, it is interesting to note, Professor Charles Lanman was also present. For me, this was revelatory. For, as Cleo McNelly Kearns in her study of Eliot and Indic traditions notes, Charles Lanman was so much receptive that he '... practiced hatha yoga on the banks of Charles, much to the delight of his students'. And Professor Kearns also refers to Swami Vivekananda as 'the senior disciple of Ramakrishna' who 'exerted a major influence on the West through his lecture tours'. 'Royce and James,' she says, testify 'to the stormy impression' Swamiji had on them. (Incidentally, Abhedanandaji's association with the Vedanta Society came to a close in 1910 and Eliot joined Harvard as a graduate student in 1911!) One can further explore these details.

A parallel area of interest is Tathagatanandaji's highlighting of the talk between Pavitranandaji and C G Jung. It is a sharp encounter and shows how, in

the early days, there was a frank and candid scepticism about Western psychoanalytic systems and the tendency to universalize those systems was firmly controverted. Today the tone of Western psychoanalysis is strident and entire systems are imposed on religious figures, particularly of India, with the focus invariably on the allegedly suppressed emotions. In this sense, the work of Vedanta Societies is seminal and, alas, much needs to be done to build pockets of alternative psychologies.

In short, here is an invaluable and indispensable source book that shows how 'the unitary vision of Vedanta is integral and inclusive'. As the spiritual leader of the Vedanta Society, New York, Tathagatanandaji provides not only needed information but also, by implication, suggests potential areas of further fruitful exploration. I do wish that Swamiji will write a more comprehensive volume.

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

Former Professor and Head, Department of English
Osmania University, Hyderabad

Sri Ramakrishna and His New Philosophy. *Dr H N Sarkar.* Manmatha Roy, Sri Ramakrishna Kendra, Jagacha, Howrah 711 321. 1999. 109 pp. Rs 60.

Sri Ramakrishna was projected into the early part of the nineteenth century as a prodigal son when India was passing through a cultural crisis owing to the influx of the gross materialistic civilization of the Occident in the arena of Indian life. The bewitching glamour of the Western culture so much captivated the minds of a section of the educated people of our country that they hailed with enthusiasm almost everything that was imported into our social life from the West. As a result, a hybrid culture began to evolve in India to the greatest detriment of our glorious philosophical traditions of the past. In the face of the cultural conquest which the British rulers were aggressively determined to make, there was an urgent necessity for the advent of a person who would be able to not only counteract the evil effects of this exotic culture and civilization but also hold before the sons of the soil the beauty and glory of India's spiritual ideas and ideals and also broaden the sectarian outlook of humanity at large. This was fulfilled in the person of Sri Ramakrishna, the great prophet of Dakshineswar, whose life and unique spiritual practices and

splendid realization of the truths of all forms of religious beliefs brought into being a movement that eventually crystallized into a non-sectarian religious organization in the name of the holy Order of Ramakrishna.

Dr H N Sarkar has given us in this book an altogether new message. He has portrayed Sri Ramakrishna as one of the greatest philosophers of India. It is true that Sri Ramakrishna never composed any philosophical treatise and he had no formal education either. But he simply poured short sayings in which we find deep philosophical implications that need explaining to be intelligible to common people. And whatever he said (as recorded in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) throbbed with life because of his realizations. According to Swami Vivekananda, 'Shelves of philosophical books can be written on each single sentence spoken by the Master.' (*Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, 373) He further said to his disciple, 'You would have understood it, had you the brains.' (374)

Now, what is the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna, and what about his new philosophy? We find the answer in his own words: 'The state of this place (meaning his own experiences) has gone much beyond what is written in the Vedas and the Vedanta.' (406) This means that the spiritual realizations of Sri Ramakrishna transcend all the realizations recorded in our scriptures. According to some Ramakrishnaites, his new philosophical thought is sometimes called New Vedanta because Sri Ramakrishna is closely connected with the philosophy of Vedanta, the crown of Hindu religious thought.

The author has discussed with his deep insight and acute analysis the entire life history of Sri Ramakrishna from his birth at Kamarpukur to his God-realization at Dakshineswar. In Sri Ramakrishna we discover a master soul who went through the whole gamut of spiritual experience and affirmed afresh the truth of our Sanatana Dharma, and for that matter, of all religions. The revelations in him as well as in his realizations throw an altogether new light on the age-old problems regarding God's nature, and this brings about a synthesis of religions and a revolution in the philosophical world.

Dr Sarkar has rightly pointed out that the new philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna is to be derived from the conversations of the Master on various subjects, namely God, the world, the individual soul and sadhana as recorded in the *Gospel*. 'God is

formless and God is with form too. ... Who knows what else He is besides these? This is, indeed, a new message to us about God, the ultimate Reality. In philosophy this is quite a new light, an original contribution to world thought. Most of the teachers of Vedanta have said that God is with form or without form, but none of them says that He is personal and impersonal in the ultimate analysis. Sri Ramakrishna says that God transcends both of them. Here Sri Ramakrishna appears to be a philosopher of extraordinary spiritual insight. He realized that all religions are at bottom one; they all teach the same truth and lead to the same goal. This conception and the consequent outlook on life would assuredly inspire tolerance, harmony and will for peace in the peoples of the world, who are at present consumed with ideological animosity, communalism, regionalism and, above all, fundamentalism. Our society goes topsy-turvy at the present day, and Sri Ramakrishna's high standard of ethics will set it right if it can be applied in our life. His teachings are the best answers to contemporary problems. Consequently, his teachings have acquired a new relevance even today and they will be relevant for centuries to come.

Prof Amalendu Chakraborty

Former Head, Department of Philosophy
Presidency College, Kolkata

Seven Lessons in Conscious Living: A Progressive Programme of Higher Learning and Spiritual Practice in the Kriya Yoga Tradition. *Roy Eugene Davis.* Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. 2000. 143 pp. Rs 150.

Notwithstanding the fact that God is beyond the senses, words and logic, it requires philosophical soundness, steadfast practice, strong will and perseverance to enable a seeker of Truth to lead a conscious life of devotion to God. What type of knowledge is essential, what needs to be done to comprehend Reality, why should one do it, and how can one lead a God-centred life—all this is described in this beautifully got-up book under review. The author is a disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda, a propagator of the kriya yoga tradition, which is based on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*.

The essence of the book is this: kriya yoga prac-

tice is not for the superficially interested person who is merely curious, emotionally immature or addicted to mental attitudes, moods or habitual behaviours. The novice of kriya yoga should first of all become familiar with the philosophical concepts and lifestyle regimens. This presupposes the knowledge of oneself as Spirit, and the relationship of the Self with Oversoul (God); along with that one should have a firm conviction that the fulfilment of one's life lies in achieving its spiritual destination. The lifestyle regimens include cultivation of mental and physical well-being. For this, the knowledge of the body-mind constitution is also necessary, because everything that is done to nurture total well-being and effective living assumes great importance. Knowledge of the primary, intermediate and advanced meditation practices should be acquired next. Regular practice of meditation greatly improves concentration, enlivens the *chakras*, gently awakens the kundalini energies, and also enables one to have conscious control of the states of consciousness. At each state of the progressive awakening of Self- and God-knowledge, the devotee's new state of awareness must be harmoniously integrated with the mind, personality and body. This process is most effectively accomplished by conscious living every moment of the day. When an aspirant has total control over his life and lives harmoniously with the cosmic Consciousness, the grace of God descends.

Each of the seven lessons in this book has three parts: philosophy, lifestyle guidelines and meditation, followed by a questionnaire that helps crystallize readers' ideas regarding their priorities and goals. Thus this book is meant to serve as a self-learning programme. While conveying his ideas, the author discusses in detail a range of topics like *doshas* (*kapha*, *vata*, *pitta*) of the body, five *pranas*, seven *chakras* and vital centres of the body. He also speaks of the five sheaths of consciousness, Patanjali's eight limbs of yoga, the law of cause and effect, the power of positive thinking, bhakti, karma and jnana yoga and the necessity of a spiritual teacher. The author expresses himself with great clarity and covers his theme with a rare type of concentration. The result is a first-rate book, executed with sincerity, vision and passionate involvement with the subject.

Dr Chetana Mandavia

Associate Professor of Plant Physiology
Gujarat Agricultural University, Ahmedabad

❧ Reports ❧

Won. The state-level athletic championship (individual seniors); by a student of the higher secondary school run by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chennai; at the Republic Day State Sports Meet in Virudhanagar; on 26 January.

Participated. Dr Khondakar Mosharraf Hossain, Minister for Health, Government of Bangladesh; Janab Sadeq Hossain Khoka, Mayor of Dhaka and Minister for Fisheries and Livestock, Government of Bangladesh; and several other dignitaries; in a 5-day programme organized by Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka, to observe Sri Ramakrishna's birthday and the centre's annual functions; from 3 to 7 March. Janab Khoka released the book *Bangladeshe Sri Ramakrishna O Tanr Parshadvirinda* brought out by the centre.

Dedicated. Photographs of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda; by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; in the newly built shrine of Ramakrishna Mission, Jammu; on 21 March (Swami Yogananda's birthday). On the same occasion, Swami Smaranandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the centre's new office block and bookshop.

Visited. Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Katihar; by Sri Ramprakash Mahato, Minister for Education, Government of Bihar; on 21 March. Sri Mahato participated in the centre's annual celebrations.

Visited. Ramakrishna Math, Mangalore; by

Sri T N Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnataka; on 27 March.

Opened. The Wonderworld, a miniature zoo of toy animals; by Srimat Swami Gahanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; at the kindergarten run by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Katihar; on 29 March. An animated dinosaur and facility for audio demonstration, including animal sounds—are some special features of the zoo.

Visited. Swami Vivekananda's ancestral home in Kolkata; by Union Tourism and Culture Minister Sri Jagmohan; on 29 March.

Provided. Fodder for 307 head of cattle belonging to drought-affected Gulati Kaval, Muninagar and Satnur villages of Bangalore Rural district; by Vivekananda Ashrama, Ulsoor; in March. The centre has also built a water tank at Gulati Kaval and dug a borewell at Satnur to provide water for 1000 head of cattle, and plans to extend its relief work to cover other drought-stricken areas.

Concluded. Ramakrishna Mission's 2-year-long Gujarat Earthquake Rehabilitation work; with the handing over of all 390 houses and 81 school buildings undertaken by the Mission headquarters in the wake of the January 2001 earthquake; on 22 March.

Started. A food-for-work scheme and the de-silting of a water tank; by Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore. The programme intends to help 120 landless Soliga tribal families of BR Hills, Chamaraajanagar district. *

A young man who graduated yesterday and stops learning today becomes uneducated tomorrow.